



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 28 FEB 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	02/27 Hong Kong hospitals can't keep up
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/28/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#hong-kong-hospitals-are-overwhelmed-by-the-death-toll-amid-an-omicron-surge
GIST	<p>Dead bodies are piling up on gurneys in hospital hallways as Hong Kong's health system is overloaded by its biggest Covid-19 outbreak of the pandemic.</p> <p>Officials said they were struggling to move the dead to the city's public morgues quickly enough after more than 400 people died from Covid-19 last week, according to the latest official statistics. The news comes as the city is struggling to tamp down on an Omicron-fueled outbreak, with more than 26,000 cases and 83 deaths reported on Sunday.</p> <p>The city's hospital authority blamed transportation delays for the situation. "That is why some bodies that were planned to be transported stayed in the hospital," said Lau Ka-hin, the chief manager of quality and standards at Hong Kong's hospital authority.</p> <p>The city's three public mortuaries, which can take up to 3,000 bodies, are nearly at full capacity, a top official for the Center for Health Protection said on Sunday.</p> <p>Public hospitals are overwhelmed as many of the sick have rushed to seek medical help in recent weeks. Over the last two weeks, Hong Kong has recorded an 821 percent spike in new cases, according to a New York Times database. Hospitals have run out of beds in isolation wards, leaving many patients waiting on gurneys on the street outside the hospitals.</p> <p>The surge in cases is putting Hong Kong's strict zero-Covid strategy under pressure. Mainland China has pursued a similar strategy. Chinese officials and pro-Beijing politicians in Hong Kong have been calling for more stringent measures to try to stamp out the outbreak, including a citywide lockdown.</p> <p>But Hong Kong lacks the kinds of resources that mainland officials have used to lock down entire cities. Hong Kong officials said they planned to ease strict testing and isolation rules in order to help free up resources, including allowing some children who test positive to stay at home instead of separating them from their parents and hospitalizing them.</p>

	They have also appealed to the public to only go to the hospital if they have severe symptoms in order to allow more space for medical emergencies.
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HEADLINE	02/28 Russia missiles mixed results
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-missiles-see-mixed-results-ukraine-war-world-watches-2022-02-28/
GIST	<p>Feb 28 (Reuters) - Russia has employed hundreds of powerful and precise ballistic missiles in the first days of its Ukraine attack, but analysts and U.S. officials say many Ukrainian defences remain intact - effects that countries around the world are watching closely.</p> <p>The use of short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) is likely being watched closely as a real-world case study by China, North Korea, and other countries that have been developing increasingly advanced arsenals of such weapons in recent years. And Western governments who see Russia as an adversary are eager to gather data on the missiles' effects in combat.</p> <p>Russia had fired more than 320 missiles as of Sunday morning, with the majority of them SRBMs, a U.S. official told reporters.</p> <p>According to U.S. estimates, the initial hours of the Russian onslaught last week included more than 100 missiles launched from land and sea, mostly SRBMs but also cruise missiles and surface-to-air missiles.</p> <p>That would make it the most intense SRBM bombardment between two territorial contiguous states in a conflict, said Ankit Panda, a senior fellow at the U.S.-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.</p> <p>"What we've seen in Ukraine corresponds to how many military establishments in many countries, including China and North Korea, may think of using precision ballistic missiles in future conflicts," he said.</p> <p>ACCURATE MISSILES</p> <p>Russia most likely used its only SRBM in active service, the Iskander-M, said Timothy Wright, a research analyst with the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).</p> <p>First used in combat in 2008 in Georgia, the Iskander is designed to confound missile defences by flying on a low trajectory and manoeuvring in flight to strike targets as far out as 500km with an accuracy of 2-5 metres, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).</p> <p>"It is likely to be able to accurately target and destroy what it is being fired at," Wright said, adding that Russia appears to possess around 150 launchers, which can also fire cruise missiles.</p> <p>There also appears to be evidence that Russia has used the OTR-21 Tochka SRBM, which was believed to have been retired, he said. "If these were in storage, Russia may have decided to put them to use, rather than scrap them."</p> <p>What the missiles targeted and how much damage they caused remains unclear amid the confusion of the developing war, but analysts said there appear to have been some strikes on Ukrainian air bases.</p> <p>Iskander missiles launched from Belarus had hit an airport in Zhytomyr in northern Ukraine on Sunday, an adviser to Ukraine's interior minister said.</p> <p>"We see some damage at airports, and it looks fairly accurate," said Jeffrey Lewis, a missile researcher at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS).</p>

Some strikes by unknown weapons at air bases appeared relatively limited in scope, however, and in some instances potentially misplaced, such as hitting stored rather than operational aircraft, said Joseph Dempsey, a defence researcher at IISS.

Ukraine has the Cold War-era Russian-made S-300v anti-aircraft missile system, which also has anti-ballistic missile capabilities, Wright said. It is unclear whether any engaged the Russian missiles, and some S-300v vehicles appeared to have been destroyed by strikes, he added.

The U.S. official said on Sunday that there were indications that some Russian missiles experienced launch failures.

"It's not the majority," the official said. "But we do believe that some number of their launches have not been successful."

Russia has not demonstrated its full air and missile capabilities and will most likely increase its waves of strikes in the coming days to degrade Ukraine's surviving defences, including anti-aircraft units that have shot down several Russian aircraft, the U.S.-based Institute for the Study of War said in a report.

"The Russian failure to comprehensively strike key Ukrainian assets is a surprising break from expected Russian operations and has likely enabled stiffer Ukrainian defence," the report said.

Some of Russia's hesitancy could be due to a lack of real-time reconnaissance and targeting data, but given the number of static targets, a more likely explanation is a desire to minimize casualties among Ukrainians, said Dmitry Stefanovich, a weapons researcher at Moscow's Institute of World Economy and Politics.

"While Iskander-M is a very capable and precise system, the probability of collateral damage, obviously, increases with the number and intensity of weapons used," he said. "If any takeaway is relevant for other SRBM-owning states, it is that those can be employed in limited manner and cautiously, an all-in salvo is not the only option."

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

As the heir to the former Soviet Union's substantial missile arsenal, Russia boasts the widest inventory of ballistic and cruise missiles in the world, according to CSIS.

But other countries are buying or developing their own new missiles, driven by security concerns and a desire to reduce reliance on other suppliers.

Before the decade is out, Asia in particular will be bristling with conventional missiles that fly farther and faster, hit harder, and are more sophisticated than ever before.

China is mass producing its DF-26 - a multipurpose weapon with a range of up to 4,000 kilometres - while the United States is developing new weapons aimed at countering Beijing in the Pacific.

Taiwan and Japan are also boosting their missile capabilities, as well as defence systems designed to counter missile threats.

South Korea's defence minister said on Monday the country would accelerate development of various "long-range, ultra-precision, and high-power ballistic missiles... and possess overwhelming striking capabilities against strategic targets" to counter North Korea's growing arsenal.

Although it hasn't tested its longest-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) since 2017, North Korea has rolled out a flurry of new SRBMs, including one that appears influenced by the Iskander's design.

	<p>Like the Iskander, North Korea's latest missiles - including "hypersonic" weapons tested in January - are designed to be faster and more manoeuvrable than older weapons, enabling them to potentially evade missile defences.</p> <p>Analysts say that although such SRBMs can't reach the United States, they would likely be used in the first wave if a war broke out, striking nearby air defences, air bases, and other targets similar to the way Russia used its missiles in the ongoing invasion.</p> <p>"North Korean and (Chinese) militaries are taking copious notes right now," said Markus Garlauskas, a former U.S. intelligence officer on North Korea.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Ukraine ceasefire talks begin
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-isolation-deepens-ukraine-resists-invasion-2022-02-28/
GIST	<p>KYIV/MOSCOW, Feb 28 (Reuters) - Talks between Russian and Ukrainian officials began on the Belarusian border on Monday, Moscow said, as Russia's diplomatic and economic isolation deepens four days after invading Ukraine, the biggest assault on a European state since World War Two.</p> <p>Russian forces seized two small cities in southeastern Ukraine and the area around a nuclear power plant, the Interfax news agency said on Monday, but ran into stiff resistance elsewhere.</p> <p>Talks began with the aim of an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian forces, the Ukrainian president's office said, read more after a Russian advance that has gone more slowly than some expected.</p> <p>Russia has been cagier, with the Kremlin declining to comment on Moscow's aim in negotiations.</p> <p>It was not clear whether any progress could be achieved after President Vladimir Putin on Thursday launched the assault and put Russia's nuclear deterrent on high alert on Sunday.</p> <p>The talks are being held on the border with strong Russian ally Belarus, where a referendum on Sunday approved a new constitution ditching the country's non-nuclear status at a time when the former Soviet republic has become a launch pad for Russian troops invading Ukraine.</p> <p>The Western-led response to the invasion was sweeping, with sanctions that effectively cut off Moscow's major financial institutions from successive Western markets sending Russia's rouble currency down 30 % against the dollar on Monday. Countries also stepped up weapons supplies to Ukraine.</p> <p>Blasts were heard before dawn on Monday in the capital of Kyiv and in the major eastern city of Kharkiv, Ukrainian authorities said. But Russian ground forces' attempts to capture major urban centres had been repelled, they added.</p> <p>Russia's defence ministry, however, said its forces had taken over the towns of Berdyansk and Enerhodar in Ukraine's southeastern Zaporizhzhya region as well as the area around the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant, Interfax reported. The plant's operations continued normally, it said.</p> <p>Ukraine denied that the nuclear plant had fallen into Russian hands, according to the news agency.</p> <p>There was fighting around the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol throughout the night, Pavlo Kyrylenko, head of the Donetsk regional administration, said on television on Monday.</p> <p>He did not say whether Russian forces had gained or lost any ground or provide any casualty figures.</p> <p>At least 102 civilians in Ukraine have been killed since Thursday, with a further 304 wounded, but the real figure is feared to be "considerably higher", U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said on Monday.</p>

More than half a million people have fled to neighbouring countries, according to the UN Refugee Agency.

A senior U.S. defence official said Russia had fired more than 350 missiles at Ukrainian targets since Thursday, some hitting civilian infrastructure.

"It appears that they are adopting a siege mentality, which any student of military tactics and strategy will tell you, when you adopt siege tactics, it increases the likelihood of collateral damage," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

WEAPONS

Partners in the U.S.-led NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) defence alliance were providing Ukraine with air-defence missiles and anti-tank weapons, Chief Jens Stoltenberg said in a tweet on Monday.

The Kremlin accused the European Union of hostile behaviour, saying weapons supplies to Ukraine were destabilising and proved that Russia was right in its efforts to demilitarise its neighbour.

It declined to comment on whether there was a risk of confrontation between Russia and NATO. Russia has demanded that NATO never admit Ukraine.

Germany said it would increase defence spending massively, casting off decades of reluctance to match its economic power with military clout.

Russia's rouble plummeted nearly 30% against the dollar on Monday, after Western nations on Saturday unveiled sweeping sanctions including blocking some Russian banks from the SWIFT international payments system.

Russia's central bank scrambled to manage the broadening fallout, saying it would resume buying gold on the domestic market, launch a repurchase auction with no limits and ease restrictions on banks' open foreign currency positions.

It also ordered brokers to block attempt by foreigners to sell Russian securities.

Several European subsidiaries of Sberbank Russia, majority owned by the Russian government, were failing or were likely to fail due to the reputational cost of the war in Ukraine, the European Central Bank said.

Britain said on Monday it was taking further measures against Russia in concert with the United States and European Union.

Corporate giants also took action, with British oil major BP BP, the biggest foreign investor in Russia, saying it would abandon its stake in state oil company Rosneft (ROSN.MM) at a cost of up to \$25 billion.

PROTESTS

Rolling protests have been held around the world against the invasion, including in Russia, where almost 6,000 people have been detained at anti-war protests since Thursday, the OVD-Info protest monitor said.

The UN Human Rights Council agreed on Monday to Ukraine's request to hold an urgent debate this week on Russia's invasion, minutes after Kyiv's envoy told the Geneva forum that some of Moscow's military actions "may amount to war crimes".

The 47-member council adopted the proposal by a vote of 29 in favour, with five against, including Russia and China.

	<p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Monday asked the European Union to allow Ukraine to gain membership immediately.</p> <p>"Our goal is to be with all Europeans and, most importantly, to be equal... I am sure we deserve it," he said in a video speech shared on social media.</p> <p>U.S. President Joe Biden will host a call with allies and partners on Monday to coordinate a united response, the White House said.</p> <p>Russia calls its actions in Ukraine a "special operation" that it says is not designed to occupy territory but to destroy its southern neighbour's military capabilities and capture what it regards as dangerous nationalists.</p> <p>The EU shut all Russian planes out of its airspace, as did Canada, forcing Russian airline Aeroflot to cancel all flights to European destinations until further notice.</p> <p>The EU also banned the Russian media outlets RT and Sputnik.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Russia sleeper agents in Ukraine identified
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/headline/russia-sleeper-agents-ukraine/2022/02/27/id/1058756/
GIST	<p>Soon after Russia invaded Ukraine on the night of March 24, painted "X" signs began appearing in all major Ukrainian cities.</p> <p>These "X" signs were often alongside objects that looked like hand held mirrors. Ukrainian sources tell Newsmax these markers were "everywhere" just before bombing began.</p> <p>Now Ukrainian defense forces know that Putin had deployed sleeper agents into cities well before the war started to mark buildings, roads and key infrastructure with luminescent markers to improve air strike accuracy along with "anchors" to improve missile strike precision.</p> <p>So far, Russia's objective of "decapitating" Ukraine's democratically elected government by launching a multi-pronged attack has been a disaster.</p> <p>Apparently, Russia's covert plan to target civilians and other targets in cities had been planned months in advance.</p> <p>The Lviv Regional Government in Western Ukraine said sleeper agents began infiltrating major cities back in December. Then, they waited for their mission.</p> <p>Videos and photographs taken by local news agencies, independent grassroots journalists, ordinary citizens, army personnel and civilian militias have documented such sabotage efforts across the country.</p> <p>News agencies and grassroots journalists used social media, news reports and Telegram channels to inform citizens and caution them to stay vigilant and destroy the markers. Citizens have reported them to local authorities and, militias, armed en masse by the government, continue to catch and interrogate the saboteurs.</p> <p>"These persons are used to improve the accuracy of bombings and for sabotage operations, they can be armed," read a statement from Ukraine's legislature.</p> <p>One video shows a man marking a gas pipe on a residential building, likely to ensure maximum destruction if a missile is launched.</p> <p>Countless others show the interrogation of the agents by citizens and army personnel.</p>

	<p>The number of such agents and markers is uncertain.</p> <p>According to police in Vinnytsia, a city in west central Ukraine, sleeper agents have been adapting their strategy using cell phones.</p> <p>"The enemy knows that Ukrainians are destroying the markers," the police statement read.</p> <p>"Now, they're using phones with location services turned on. We implore everyone to turn your location off. This is very serious. A turned on location could cost you your life."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Ukraine slows Russia advance--for now
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-kyiv-europe-moscow-016cc6cbc65ae95286d825a4ebeb1c5
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Outgunned but determined Ukrainian troops slowed Russia's advance and held onto the capital and other key cities — at least for now. In the face of stiff resistance and devastating sanctions, President Vladimir Putin ordered Russia's nuclear forces put on high alert, threatening to elevate the war to a terrifying new level.</p> <p>Explosions and gunfire that have disrupted life since the invasion began last week appeared to subside around Kyiv overnight, as Ukrainian and Russian delegations met Monday on Ukraine's border with Belarus. It's unclear what, if anything, those talks would yield.</p> <p>Terrified Ukrainian families huddled in shelters, basements or corridors, waiting to find out. Exact death tolls are unclear, but the U.N. human rights chief said 102 civilians have been killed and hundreds wounded — warning that figure was likely a vast undercount — and Ukraine's president said at least 16 children were among the dead. More than 500,000 people have fled the country since the invasion, another U.N. official said Monday — among the millions who have left their homes.</p> <p>Russia's Central Bank scrambled to shore up the tanking ruble Monday and the U.S. and European countries upped weapons shipments to Ukraine. While they hope to curb Putin's aggression after he unleashed Europe's biggest conflict since World War II, the measures also risked pushing an increasingly cornered Putin closer to the edge.</p> <p>"I sit and pray for these negotiations to end successfully, so that they reach an agreement to end the slaughter, and so there is no more war," said Alexandra Mikhailova, weeping as she clutched her cat in a makeshift shelter in the strategic southeastern Ukrainian city of Mariupol. Around her, parents sought to console children and keep them warm.</p> <p>In Kyiv, long lines formed outside supermarkets on Monday as residents were allowed out of bomb shelters and homes for the first time since a curfew imposed Saturday.</p> <p>The relative lull in warfare Monday morning in Ukraine was unlikely to last.</p> <p>Neighboring Belarus could send troops to help Russia as soon as Monday, according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of current U.S. intelligence assessments. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.</p> <p>U.S. officials say they believe the invasion has been more difficult, and slower, than the Kremlin envisioned, though that could change as Moscow adapts. The British Defense Ministry said Monday that the bulk of Putin's forces are about 30 kilometers (20 miles) north of Kyiv, their advance having been slowed by Ukrainian forces.</p>

Western nations ramped up the pressure with a freeze on Russia's hard currency reserves, threatening to bring Russia's economy to its knees. Russians withdrew savings and sought to shed rubles for dollars and euros, while Russian businesses scrambled to protect their finances.

In addition to sanctions, the U.S. and Germany announced they will send Stinger missiles to Ukraine among other military supplies. The European Union — founded to ensure peace on the continent after World War II — is supplying lethal aid for the first time, including fighter jets.

EU defense ministers were to meet Monday to discuss how to get the pledged weaponry into Ukraine. Germany's defense minister said without elaborating that her country has "channels and possibilities" to do that, and a trainload of Czech equipment arrived Sunday. Blocking off those shipments will clearly be a key Russian priority.

It remains to be seen how much the weaponry will help Ukraine fend off Russia's vastly greater arsenal. The increasingly erratic Putin made a clear link between ever-tightening sanctions and his decision Sunday to raise Russia's nuclear posture. He also pointed at "aggressive statements" by NATO as a reason for his move, a reference to his long-running stance that the U.S.-led alliance is an existential threat to Russia.

U.S. and British officials played down Putin's nuclear threat, and its practical meaning was not immediately clear. Russia and the United States typically have land- and submarine-based nuclear forces that are prepared for combat at all times, but nuclear-capable bombers and other aircraft are not.

A tiny sliver of hope emerged as talks began between Ukrainian and Russian officials Monday. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said it would demand an immediate cease-fire.

While Ukraine sent its defense minister and other top officials, the Russian delegation is led by Putin's adviser on culture — an unlikely envoy for ending the war and a sign of how Moscow views the talks. It wasn't immediately clear what Putin is seeking in the talks or from the war itself.

Western officials believe Putin wants to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own, reviving Moscow's Cold War-era influence. His comments Sunday raised fears that the invasion of Ukraine could lead to nuclear war, whether by design or mistake.

In New York, the 193-member U.N. General Assembly [scheduled an emergency session Monday](#) on Russia's invasion.

With the Ukrainian capital besieged, the Russian military offered to allow residents to leave Kyiv via a safe corridor, raising fears a further onslaught is coming. The [mayor of the city of nearly 3 million](#) had earlier expressed doubt that civilians could be evacuated. Authorities have been handing out weapons to anyone willing to defend the city. Ukraine is also releasing prisoners with military experience who want to fight, and training people to make firebombs.

Battles also broke out in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, and strategic ports in the country's south came under assault from Russian forces. Mariupol, a strategic port city on the Sea of Azov, is "hanging on," said Zelenskyy adviser Oleksiy Arestovich.

The Russian military claimed Monday it had taken full control of Ukraine's airspace after showering its air bases and air defense batteries with air and missile strikes. But a similar claim on the first day of the invasion turned out to be untrue, and U.S. officials said Sunday that Moscow has failed to fully control Ukrainian skies.

In Mariupol, where Ukrainians were trying to fend off attack, a medical team at a city hospital desperately tried to revive a 6-year-old girl in unicorn pajamas who was mortally wounded in Russian shelling.

During the rescue attempt, a doctor in blue medical scrubs, pumping oxygen into the girl, looked directly into the Associated Press video camera capturing the scene.

	<p>“Show this to Putin,” he said angrily. “The eyes of this child, and crying doctors.”</p> <p>Their resuscitation efforts failed, and the girl lay dead on a gurney, covered by her blood-splattered jacket. Nearly 900 kilometers (560 miles) away, Faina Bystritska was under threat in the city of Chernihiv.</p> <p>“I wish I had never lived to see this,” said Bystritska, an 87-year-old Jewish survivor of World War II. She said sirens blare almost constantly in the city, about 150 kilometers (90 miles) from Kyiv.</p> <p>Among Western sanctions is a freeze on Russia’s hard currency reserves, which Putin had built up in recent years to increase the country’s economic independence. The unprecedented move could have devastating consequences for the country’s financial system.</p> <p>The U.S., European Union and Britain also agreed to block selected Russian banks from the SWIFT system, which facilitates moving money around thousands of banks and other financial institutions worldwide.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 US embassy Russia: leave ‘immediately’
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/us-embassy-americans-russia-73cb348a-4598-4749-b974-b0fc76c25766.html
GIST	<p>More and more airlines are canceling flights into and out of Russia and American citizens in the country should consider leaving "immediately," the U.S. Embassy in Moscow warned in a security alert Sunday.</p> <p>Why it matters: The move came on the fourth day of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, hours after the European Union announced that it would ban all Russian aircraft from its airspace.</p> <p>The Level 4 travel advisory recommends not traveling to Russia due to "ongoing tension along the border with Ukraine, the potential for harassment against U.S. citizens [and] the embassy’s limited ability to assist U.S. citizens in Russia," among other reasons.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Russia shuts stock market; ruble crashes
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/business/russia-ruble-banks-sanctions/index.html
GIST	<p>London (CNN Business)Russia's currency crashed to a record low against the US dollar Monday as the country's financial system reeled from crushing sanctions imposed by Western countries in response to the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The ruble lost more than 30% of its value to trade at 109 to the dollar at 2.30 a.m. ET after earlier plummeting as much as 40%. The start of trading on the Russian stock market was delayed, and then canceled entirely, according to a statement from the country's central bank.</p> <p>The latest barrage of sanctions came Saturday, when the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Canada said they would expel some Russian banks from SWIFT, a global financial messaging service, and "paralyze" the assets of Russia's central bank.</p> <p>President Vladimir Putin's government has spent the last eight years preparing Russia for tough sanctions by building up a war chest of \$630 billion in foreign currency reserves, but his "fortress" economy is now under unprecedented assault and at least some of that financial firepower is now frozen.</p> <p>"We will also ban the transactions of Russia's central bank and freeze all its assets, to prevent it from financing Putin's war," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement Sunday. The collapse in the currency prompted the Russian central bank to implement emergency measures on Monday, including a huge hike in interest rates to 20% from 9.5%.</p>

"External conditions for the Russian economy have drastically changed," the bank said in the statement. "This is needed to support financial and price stability and protect the savings of citizens from depreciation," the bank added.

The central bank said it would provide an update on share trading at 9 a.m. local time (1 a.m. ET) on Tuesday.

"Due to the current situation, the Bank of Russia has decided not to open a stock market section, a derivatives market section, or a derivatives market section on the Moscow Exchange today," the statement read.

Russia is a leading exporter of oil and gas but many other sectors of its economy rely on imports. As the value of the ruble falls, they will become much more expensive to buy, pushing up inflation. The crackdown on its leading banks, and the exclusion of some of them from the SWIFT secure messaging system that connects thousands of financial institutions around the world will also make it harder for it to sell exports.

Run on the banks?

Analysts warned that the turmoil could lead to a run on Russian banks, as savers try to secure their deposits and hoard cash.

"This weekend's events now mean that no G7 banks will be able to buy Russian rubles, sending the currency into free-fall, with the end result we could see a huge inflationary shock unfold inside Russia," Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK, said in a note on Monday.

"A run on Russian banks inside the country appears to be already starting, as ordinary Russians fear that their credit cards might no longer work," he added.

The Russian central bank last week intervened in the currency markets to try to prop up the ruble. And on Friday, it said it was increasing the supply of bills to ATMs to meet increased demand for cash. Russian state news agency TASS reported that several banks had seen increased withdrawals since the invasion of Ukraine, notably of foreign currency.

"These are the conditions in which runs on local banks begin," wrote Neil Shearing, chief economist at Capital Economics. "The [Russian central bank] has this morning raised interest rates to 20% but other measures (e.g. limits on deposit withdrawals) are possible later today. All of this will accelerate Russia's economic downturn — a fall in GDP of [about] 5% now looks likely."

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HEADLINE	02/28 Phone: Ukraine's most effective weapon
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/the-phone-has-become-the-ukrainian-presidents-most-effective-weapon
GIST	<p>In a string of phone calls from a besieged Kyiv, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has persuaded the west to agree to a set of sanctions against Russia that were inconceivable a week ago.</p> <p>Sensing how European public opinion is responding to the bravery of his people, Zelenskiy has been constantly on the phone to western leaders, using his Twitter feed to cajole, encourage, scold and praise his allies. In the process, sanctions regarded as unthinkable a week ago have become a moral baseline. The pace at which the west has been agreeing to the new sanctions has also left the lawyers, officials and bankers gasping for air, officials admit, as they work under severe pressure to turn headlines into reality.</p> <p>One leader's office said: "We are in awe of him. He may not eventually be able to save Ukraine, or change Russia, but he is changing Europe."</p>

Take Saturday's diplomacy. Zelensky said he opened another day on the diplomatic frontline with a phone call to Emmanuel Macron, followed as the day progressed with calls to the European Commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen, the Italian prime minister, Mario Draghi, the president of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis, the prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Azerbaijani president, Ilham Aliyev, the Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, the Pope, the Czech prime minister, Petr Fiala, the Polish prime minister, Andrzej Duda, and finally a virtual nightcap with the British prime minister.

The day before, the number of calls was similar, all focused on requests for arms and tougher sanctions. Quite how Zelenskiy managed to make these calls, rally the home front, direct his army and sleep is hard to fathom. One who has heard him in action says: "He is very direct, very passionate and very practical." But the calls have produced golden rewards for Zelenskiy and helped turn the tide.

The pace of societal change quickens in most wars, but to watch Germany in the space of week take a 180 degree turn and back arms sales to Ukraine, vow to [increase defence spending to 2% of GDP](#) and [agree to cut Russia off from Swift](#) is not just a set of extraordinary policy changes, it marks a watershed in a post-second world war mindset. Equally, the Italian prime minister, Mario Draghi, emphasising earlier in the week the need for the long-term solutions necessary to wean Italy off Russian gas, realised the previous political opposition to tougher immediate measures had evaporated.

His office reject reports that he mounted strong objections to [Russia](#) being cut off from Swift, saying the issue had not seriously been pressed at meetings at the G7 leaders last week, But they admit that Zelenskiy, through his resourcefulness, and Russia, by its arrogance, had handed the initiative to countries like the UK, Canada and France to sway others to accept that Russia could be cut off from the Swift payments systems. On Saturday night the identity of the Russian banks likely to be cut was still being settled, but Gazbank, critical to energy transactions, is likely to be excluded.

But perhaps the most devastating measure being considered did not come directly from Zelensky's relentless lobbying. Some European leaders believe it will be the wholly unexpected freeze on the assets of the Russian central bank, the single most important Russian financial institution, that will prove the unravelling of Putin's economy. One European official said: "It was kept in our back pocket, but it is going to mean a run on the ruble on Monday that they will not contain."

Another official admitted the long-term chances of the Ukrainian military being able to hold out against the vastly superior Russian forces are limited. The true goal is to make the price for Putin economically and politically so crippling high that he is forced to realise he cannot win on his terms.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Chinese historians: 'fooled by Putin'
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/they-were-fooled-by-putin-chinese-historians-speak-out-against-russian-invasion
GIST	<p>For Xu Guoqi, a Chinese historian, Beijing's reluctance to denounce Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine is alarming.</p> <p>"I'm a historian of the first world war. Europe sleep-walked into a huge conflict over 100 years ago, which also had had enormous consequences for China," Xu said. "The world may be at the point of no return again".</p> <p>But looking at how Chinese diplomats are responding to it, and how Chinese people have talked about it on social media in the past week, he said, "I'm afraid it seems we still have not learned the lessons of the past tragedies. As a historian I'm very disappointed."</p> <p>On Saturday morning, five renowned Chinese historians – Xu included – wrote an open letter denouncing Russia's action on its neighbour and calling for peace. The authors of the letter hope to persuade Beijing to make its stance clearer: that what Russia is doing is wrong, and China should say it out loud.</p>

“What will this war lead to? Will it lead to a large-scale world war?” the historians asked. “Great catastrophes in history often started with local conflicts. We strongly opposed Russia’s war against Ukraine. Russia’s invasion of a sovereign state by force ... is a violation of the norms of international relations based on the United Nations charter and a breach of the existing international security system.”

In public, China opposes any act that violates territorial integrity. China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, articulated this position again in a late-night post published on his ministry’s website on Friday. But over the course of the past week, as civilians were killed and western sanctions intensified, Beijing continued to echo Putin’s argument that Moscow’s action is a response to Nato’s eastward expansion.

“Do they genuinely believe in that? Is it worth [it] for China to undermine its own credibility to defend the indefensible? I’m afraid they were fooled by Putin,” Xu said, emphasising that he and his colleagues wrote this letter because they love the country, and they do not wish a potential worldwide tragedy to stall China’s future.

“This is simply a black and white matter,” he continued. “This is an invasion. As the Chinese saying goes: you cannot call a deer a horse. As Chinese historians, we do not wish to see China being dragged into something that will fundamentally harm the current world order. For the love of mankind, world peace and development, we should make this clear.”

But Xu and his colleagues’ open letter was quickly taken down by internet censors after two hours and 40 minutes online. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, pro-war Chinese trolls denounced the authors – who are based in Nanjing, Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai – as “shameful” and “traitorous”. “Why did you not say anything during the west’s invasion in Iraq,” one quipped sarcastically.

Is Beijing changing its thinking?

It is difficult to gauge the public opinion in China, but in the past few days, while Beijing’s diplomats struggle with a coherent argument, many Chinese nationalists expressed their admiration of Putin online. Some called the Russian leader “the greatest strategist of this century”. Others said China should leverage the current situation to “take Taiwan back”.

But at the same time, censors are not taking down all anti-war posts, either. On WeChat, for example, many have also been discussing the situation in Ukraine. On Sunday, as Putin ordered his military to put Russia’s nuclear deterrence forces on high alert, some users posted a 1994 statement in which China urged all nuclear-weapon states not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against states that do not have them, including Ukraine.

On social media, some of those who are against Russia’s action are also speaking out – although they are often met with pro-war trolls who accuse them of being “weak” and “naive”. “If Russia has issues with Nato, it should deal with Nato, why invade Ukraine?” one questioned in a WeChat video that attracted over half a million views in a span of hours. Nearly 9,000 users liked the video and more than 23,000 shared it.

There is a long history of Chinese intellectuals speaking out, individually or collectively, on major domestic and international issues, including in ways that challenge official policies, said Prof Jeff Wasserstrom, a historian of modern China at the University of California, Irvine. “Sometimes the risks involved are small but at other points it is truly daring to engage in this time-honoured practice.”

But Wasserstrom said the five prominent Chinese historians’ letter was particularly noticeable because of the tightening of the freedom of speech on Chinese campuses – both on the mainland and in Hong Kong - in recent years. [Several high-profile Chinese academics](#) have been barred from teaching.

As the war intensifies, there are signs that Beijing may be changing its thinking. On Friday, China abstained at the end of the UN security council vote condemning the Russian aggression. Western

	<p>diplomats saw this as a sign that Beijing is increasingly uneasy at being seen as defending Putin's action, which has drawn worldwide condemnation.</p> <p>On Sunday, the Chinese envoy to Kyiv, Fan Xianrong, stressed in a video address that China respected Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also urged Ukraine-based Chinese nationals not to reveal their identity or display any signs of their nationality, reversing his embassy's earlier advisory that encouraged citizens to stick the national flag on their cars.</p> <p>"Sooner or later, they'll have to come to [their] senses," Xu said. "The Chinese are very pragmatic. They need to understand they are a big beneficiary of the current world order, under which China also prospered. This is an opportunity for all of us to demonstrate we are a real responsible stakeholder."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Russia stumbles in biggest test of military
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-stumbles-in-biggest-test-of-its-military-force-11646000303
GIST	<p>The Russian military has faltered early in its invasion of Ukraine, as stiff resistance threatens to turn Moscow's hopes for a swift victory into a protracted and costly war, U.S. officials and allied military experts say.</p> <p>The Kremlin's ongoing invasion represents the most formidable challenge for the Russian military since it was modernized under Gen. Valery Gerasimov, Russia's top military officer who was appointed to his post in 2012. Yet no Ukrainian cities have been taken by the Russian military. Some of the Ukrainian Air Force and air defenses are still intact.</p> <p>Western officials and analysts say that Russia's strategy had been based on the premise that an initial barrage of missile strikes and a thrust toward Ukraine's capital would bring about the quick collapse of President Volodymyr Zelensky's government. Mr. Zelensky, however, remains defiant while facing long odds.</p> <p>Russia holds many military advantages over Ukraine's forces. One third of Russia's combat power near Ukraine is still outside the country, the Pentagon says, and has yet to enter the fray. The next few days could prove pivotal, as Russian President Vladimir Putin ponders whether to take a more aggressive approach to bludgeon Mr. Zelensky's government into submission, potentially causing more civilian casualties.</p> <p>The Russian military has a prodigious array of artillery, rockets and air power. Employing these weapons, however, would only further antagonize the population that Moscow is hoping to draw into its sphere of influence and make it harder for the Kremlin to control a country of 44 million.</p> <p>Since the start of the conflict, Russia has fired more than 320 missiles. Its ground forces have advanced from Belarus to within 30 kilometers of Kyiv's city center. Russian forces have also moved swiftly from their bases in Crimea and carried out a rare amphibious landing from the Sea of Azov.</p> <p>Now, the Pentagon says there are signs that Russia is resorting to more firepower, including rockets, in its attempt to take Chernihiv, a city 150 kilometers northeast of Kyiv.</p> <p>Mick Ryan, a retired Australian Army major general who has studied advanced warfare, says Russia's failure so far to achieve decisive gains and its potential depletion of precision-munition supplies "probably will force them to use older weapons that are less precise and more deadly."</p> <p>"In the next 72 hours I expect greater lethality on the battlefield," he added.</p> <p>Western analysts say that there are few parallels between Russia's approach so far in Ukraine and how it would face off against a NATO force, where mass firepower would be used from the outset and the potential use of nuclear weapons could also be threatened.</p>

The Russian military has improved considerably since its wars to subdue insurgents in Chechnya, which lasted until 2000, and intervention eight years later in Georgia, which succeeded in securing two breakaway regions.

Russia's operations since then had been limited and sometimes were carried out in areas where there was a reservoir of support. In 2014, the Russians quietly infiltrated Crimea with special forces, naval infantry and intelligence operatives and secured the peninsula with nary a shot. That same year, Russia intervened in the Donbas region in southeast Ukraine and marshaled a proxy force of separatists.

Russia's 2015 intervention in Syria to buttress Syrian President Bashar al-Assad showcased its air power and long-range missile capability. In contrast to the invasion of Ukraine, however, the Syria operation didn't include the deployment of a large number of Russian ground forces or combat against an organized army.

"This isn't the small, handpicked Syria task force that was lavished with support and made relatively few mistakes," said Dara Massicot, an expert on the Russian military at the Rand Corporation, referring to Russia's attack on Ukraine. "A force of this size is too large to hide readiness and personnel problems within the Russian military."

Ukraine's forces have their problems too. Mr. Zelensky's reluctance to order a general mobilization until late last week delayed the call-up of reservists and consequently the movement of some units into defensive positions, said Phillip Karber of the Potomac Foundation, a policy center.

The longstanding U.S. policy of modulating the supply of arms to Ukraine so as not to provoke Russia has also affected the country's military capability. Stinger antiaircraft systems weren't sent to Ukraine until January when the Biden administration approved a request by Latvia and Lithuania to provide the U.S.-made systems from their arsenals. The U.S. has since opted to send antiaircraft missiles from its own inventory. Experts say, however, that it takes time to distribute the weapons and train Ukrainian forces in how to use them. The U.S. hasn't outfitted the Ukrainians with antiship missiles.

The Ukrainian forces have benefited from the U.S., British and other allied training, however, as well as U.S. intelligence about Russia military moves. The Ukrainians have also been adept at moving their surface-to-air systems and turning them off at times to make them harder to be targeted by the Russians, Western analysts say. As a result, Russia has yet to achieve air superiority in the country.

A senior U.S. defense official said Sunday that the Russians have been frustrated by the slow pace of their offensive but will try to adjust their strategy and tactics in the face of setbacks. "To some degree, they've done it to themselves in terms of their fuel and logistics and sustainment," the official said. "We would expect them to learn from these issues and adapt to them and try to overcome them."

James Hackett, Senior Fellow for Defense and Military Analysis at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a think tank in London, noted that Russia still retains advantages in personnel and equipment, though movement could now be more difficult than before since bridges have been destroyed and the Ukrainians have had time to better prepare defenses.

The course of the conflict, analysts say, will now turn on whether Ukraine can hold Kyiv and what kind of guerrilla battle the Ukrainians can maintain in the longer run.

Jack Watling, an expert on land warfare at the Royal United Services Institute, a British defense think tank, says that his analysis before Russia's invasion had been that Ukraine's conventional forces would hold out for 10 days before shifting to more unconventional resistance warfare.

Previous conflicts, Mr. Watling said, have shown that "the Russians always take more military losses than they should." But a question is how much public support Mr. Putin will have at home, as the war drags on and Russian soldiers die.

	<p>Moscow's hope, he said, had been to avoid this prospect by planning a "shock and awe" demonstration that involved rapid advances and the seizure of a few key objectives in the hope the Zelensky government would quickly surrender or flee.</p> <p>"That failed," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Belarus renounces non-nuclear status
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxd749/belarus-russia-nuclear-weapons-ukraine
GIST	<p>Nuclear tensions ramped up in eastern Europe on Sunday, as Belarus changed its constitution to renounce its non-nuclear status. The move, approved by a national referendum, came the same day as Russian President Vladimir Putin placed his own country's nuclear forces on high alert.</p> <p>The amendment, approved by 65.2 percent of voters according to Russian media, paves the way for nuclear weapons to be stationed in Belarus for the first time since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.</p> <p>Polina Sinovets, the head of the Odessa Center for Nonproliferation in Ukraine and an associate professor in international relations, called the move a symbolic gesture that aimed to "show NATO the possibility of Russian nuclear deployments in Belarus."</p> <p>"By deploying its nukes in Belarus, Russia will show that now we are definitely living in the new Cold War," she told VICE World News. "But I still highly doubt the practical role of such nukes, which will only [be used] if Russia is directly attacked by NATO on its own territory."</p> <p>Sunday's poll triggered anti-war protests across Belarus, resulting in the arrests of at least 290 people. Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, a staunch ally of Moscow, has supported the invasion, allowing Russian troops to enter Ukraine through the country's southern border.</p> <p>"If you [the West] transfer nuclear weapons to Poland or Lithuania, to our borders, then I will turn to Putin to return the nuclear weapons that I gave away without any conditions," Lukashenko said on Sunday at a polling station.</p> <p>Lukashenko also warned that the war in Ukraine would become a "meat grinder," as Belarusian troops seemed poised to join the invasion. Media reports this weekend quoted Ukrainian state security and an anonymous U.S. official as saying Belarusian special forces were seen loading onto planes to be deployed to the besieged Ukrainian capital Kyiv.</p> <p>Putin placed his own nuclear forces on high alert on Sunday, citing tough sanctions by Western nations and "aggressive statements" by NATO as justification.</p> <p>"Western countries aren't only taking unfriendly actions against our country in the economic sphere, but top officials from leading NATO members made aggressive statements regarding our country," Putin said in a televised speech.</p> <p>Western nations have refused to recognise the results of Sunday's referendum, which also places more power into the hands of Lukashenko's All-Belarusian People's Assembly, as well as granting him lifetime immunity from prosecution if he leaves office.</p> <p>"The new constitution is mostly aimed to fix the Lukashenko permanent presidential status, as recent elections first proved that it may probably change very soon," said Sinovets, of the Odessa Center for Nonproliferation in Ukraine.</p> <p>Major protests followed the 2020 national elections, won by a landslide for Lukashenko but widely condemned as rigged by international observers.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Elections threat: attacks from within
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/attacks-within-seen-growing-threat-elections
GIST	<p>Election officials preparing for this year's midterms have yet another security concern to add to an already long list that includes death threats, disinformation, ransomware and cyberattacks — threats from within.</p> <p>In a handful of states, authorities are investigating whether local officials directed or aided in suspected security breaches at their own election offices. At least some have expressed doubt about the 2020 presidential election, and information gleaned from the breaches has surfaced in conspiracy theories pushed by allies of former President Donald Trump.</p> <p>Adding to the concern is a wave of candidates for state and local election offices this year who parrot Trump's false claims about his loss to Democrat Joe Biden.</p> <p>"Putting them in positions of authority over elections is akin to putting arsonists in charge of a fire department," said Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, a Democrat and former law school dean who serves as Michigan's top elections official.</p> <p>Experts say insider threats have always been a concern. But previously, the focus was mostly on what a volunteer poll worker or part-time employee could do to a polling place or county system, said Ryan Macias, who advises officials at the federal, state and local levels on election security. Now the potential harm extends to the very foundation of democracy — conducting fair elections.</p> <p>"Since 2020, the coordinated efforts to have threat actors run for office, apply to be election officials and volunteer as a poll worker or observer should be treated as national security concerns," Macias said.</p> <p>The potential risks posed by insider attacks run from granting unauthorized access to sensitive information to planting malware within election systems.</p> <p>While insider threats are the hardest to guard against, Macias said measures are in place to recover from an attack. Most of the country relies on paper ballots filled out by hand or with the use of a voting machine, so there should be a paper record of each ballot cast. In addition, post-election checks are designed to identify potential manipulation or discrepancies in the vote.</p> <p>This year, voters in 25 states will elect their state's chief election official, and several races feature candidates who dispute the outcome of the 2020 presidential contest despite no evidence of widespread fraud or a coordinated scheme to steal the election.</p> <p>Some voters also will decide who will run their local elections as the next county clerk. It's these local election offices that have experienced security breaches.</p> <p>In Mesa County, Colorado, authorities are investigating whether unauthorized people were granted access to county voting equipment. State officials began investigating after the county's voting system passwords appeared on a conservative website. Because each county has unique passwords maintained by the state, officials identified them as belonging to Mesa County, where Trump won nearly 63% of the vote.</p> <p>Clerk Tina Peters — a Republican elected in 2018 — then appeared at a "cybersymposium" hosted by Trump ally Mike Lindell, the MyPillow CEO who has sought to prove that voting systems were somehow manipulated to favor Democrats.</p> <p>At that event a copy of Mesa County's election management system — which is used for designing ballots, configuring voting machines and tallying results — was distributed. Experts have described the unauthorized release as serious, potentially providing a "practice environment" to probe for vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Peters, in an interview, said she made the copy of a county voting system hard drive to preserve "the evidence of how you get to the result of an election, who came in, who made changes, who did what." She</p>

denied knowledge of how a copy came to be distributed at the Lindell event and would not say who was with her when the copy was made.

“I didn’t go in to try to address some conspiracy theory,” Peters told The Associated Press. “It’s just my responsibility to protect, and solely my responsibility to protect election records.”

A grand jury in Mesa County is reviewing the case. Meanwhile, Peters has announced plans to run for secretary of state, overseeing elections for Colorado.

Elsewhere in Colorado, state officials are investigating after the election clerk in Elbert County, southeast of Denver, indicated he made two copies of a voting system hard drive last summer.

An attorney for Dallas Schroeder said in a written response to the state that Schroeder believes he had a “statutory duty to preserve election records” and was concerned that a visit by state officials to prepare for the 2021 elections “might erase or alter electronic records of the November 2020 election.”

There has been no indication of widespread fraud or other major irregularities following the 2020 election in Colorado or elsewhere.

In Ohio, federal and state authorities are investigating after network data purportedly from the Lake County Board of Elections in suburban Cleveland was made available online along with other data by people seeking to show the 2020 election was somehow manipulated.

A state analysis determined the data wasn’t from the Board of Elections at all, but rather a network that runs other county business. Secretary of State Frank LaRose, a former Republican state lawmaker who serves as Ohio’s chief election official, said it showed only “innocuous traffic,” such as between a county computer and a printer, but was used to suggest something nefarious.

“They grabbed that and they said, ‘Oh, look, here’s evidence,’” LaRose said. “It was evidence of nothing, and they were nowhere close to the Board of Elections.”

In Michigan, the secretary of state’s office recently announced a potential security breach at an election office in Roscommon County, in the rural northern part of the state, where someone is suspected of gaining unauthorized access to voting systems. State authorities are investigating.

Experts said these types of security breaches have so far been few and most election officials are experienced, neutral professionals who follow the rules and want no part of conspiracy theories.

But, they said, any official found to be undermining elections and breaking the law must be held accountable. No charges have been brought so far in any of the breaches being investigated in Colorado, Ohio and Michigan.

“One of the keys to combatting insider threats is that there are consequences, and we haven’t seen that yet,” said Matt Masterson, a former top election security official during the Trump administration.

In advance of this year’s midterm elections, federal officials who oversee election security say they have conducted training with officials on ways they can limit access to voting systems to reduce the chances of an insider threat.

In Ohio, state election officials credited additional cybersecurity measures put in place in 2019 with preventing the attempted breach in Lake County, which Trump won in 2016 and 2020. A state order required that election-related systems be separated from county networks to better protect them.

In Michigan, Benson said her office is “keeping a close eye — closer than ever before” on local election officials and is prepared to stop anyone who tries to jeopardize election security.

	<p>In Colorado, Secretary of State Jena Griswold recently announced a set of temporary rules she said were designed to address “emerging security risks,” specifically citing the cases in Mesa and Elbert counties.</p> <p>The new rules reduce the number of county employees with access to the election management system and require that they be identified in the county’s security plan filed with the state. Proof of background checks must be provided to the state for anyone present as voting systems are prepared for an election.</p> <p>“Undoubtedly, we will see more insider threats to come,” said Griswold, a Democrat. “States have to prepare themselves.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Russian invasion impacts to spaceflight
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/science/2022/02/the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-will-have-myriad-impacts-on-spaceflight/
GIST	<p>Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine this week will have devastating consequences for the people on the ground. Although the terrestrial implications of this war are <i>far greater</i> than those for spaceflight, there will nonetheless be ripple effects felt by space programs around the world.</p> <p>During a speech on Thursday about US sanctions on Russia as a result of its invasion, President Joe Biden even mentioned space. "Between our actions and those of our allies and partners, we estimate that we'll cut off more than half of Russia's high tech imports and will strike a blow to their ability to continue to modernize their military," he said. "It'll degrade their aerospace industry, including their space program."</p> <p>So what does this mean? While it is very early in this crisis, this article will attempt to draw the broad outlines of how this conflict may impact spaceflight. As the situation is dynamic and the political landscape is tumultuous, please note that rapid changes are possible.</p> <p>International Space Station</p> <p>The most prominent space issue concerns the fate of the International Space Station, which is operated by 15 nations but led by the United States and Russia. The countries rely on one another: Russia provides fuel and thruster capability to periodically re-boost the space station to a higher altitude, and NASA gyroscopes provide stability, and its solar panels generate the vast majority of electricity. At present, the station cannot operate without the consent of both partners.</p> <p>After Biden's comments on Thursday, the head of Russia's main space corporation, Dmitry Rogozin, lashed out in a series of tweets in which he characterized Biden's actions as "Alzheimer's Sanctions." A full translation of Rogozin's comments can be found here. In his rant, Rogozin complained about the loss of RD-180 engine sales (the 01/01/2023 date), Elon Musk ("talented businessmen"), and other irritants. Rogozin also appears to assume that the US government will prevent NASA from working with Russia.</p> <p>"If you block cooperation with us, who will save the ISS from an unguided de-orbit to impact on the territory of the US or Europe?" Rogozin asked. "There's also the chance of impact of the 500-ton construction in India or China. Do you want to threaten them with such a prospect? The ISS doesn't fly over Russia, so all the risk is yours. Are you ready for it?"</p> <p>In response to these comments, NASA issued a measured response on Thursday evening, saying it was continuing to work with Russia and its partners to safely fly the International Space Station. "The new export control measures will continue to allow US-Russia civil space cooperation," the agency said. "No changes are planned to the agency's support for ongoing in-orbit and ground station operations."</p> <p>It remains in the interest of both NASA and Russia's space program to continue operating the space station. However, the situation could change in response to political pressure, particularly from the US Congress.</p>

For example, a US House Republican from Houston, Dan Crenshaw, [tweeted Thursday night](#) that NASA should abandon its partnership with Russia. "Time to replace the Russians on the International Space Station. Kick them out of the program, train up some Ukrainian cosmonauts, and see if @elonmusk can replace the Russian half of the station with something that's not falling apart," Crenshaw said.

If the relationship were to actually fracture, NASA and its commercial partners could probably come up with a solution to use Northrop Grumman Cygnus and SpaceX Crew Dragon vehicles to boost the station while accelerating the development of some kind of service module. But even such a temporary fix would take months or years to improvise.

The bottom line is that unless the United States and Russia get into a shooting war, the most likely course for the space station is that it continues to fly at least for a few more years, and possibly even all the way to 2030. But given the present tensions and those of the last 12 months, this will probably be the last major partnership between NASA and Roscosmos in space for a long, long time.

Rocket engines

Engineers and technicians in Russia and Ukraine make some of the best rocket engines in the world, and they have long had many Western customers.

Until the rise of SpaceX and its Falcon 9 rocket, a majority of US national defense satellites launched into space this century did so onboard a rocket powered by Russian-made RD-180 rocket engines. The Atlas V rocket, which is assembled and launched by United Launch Alliance, continues to use these Russian engines. However, after the Crimean Crisis in 2014, the US Congress told United Launch Alliance that it would have to stop buying the Russian engines.

That has now happened. The Atlas V rocket is due to retire later this decade and has about two dozen launches left. United Launch Alliance chief executive Tory Bruno said the company has taken delivery of all RD-180 engines for those missions. They should not be affected by the current Russia crisis.

The situation is less certain for the Antares rocket, which is assembled and launched by Northrop Grumman. The rocket uses a first-stage body built by the Yuzhnoye and Yuzhmash facilities in Ukraine and RD-181 rocket engines built in Russia. On Friday, there were [unconfirmed speculative reports](#) that the Yuzhnoye and Yuzhmash facilities in Dnipro, Ukraine, have been damaged or even destroyed by fighting.

Last week, Northrop Grumman launched the Cygnus NG-17 mission to ferry supplies to the International Space Station. At the time, the company said it has all of the Antares components it needs for the next two launches of the Cygnus missions, tentatively scheduled for August of this year and April 2023.

But after that, NASA [has indicated](#) it is likely to procure more Cygnus flights in the middle of this decade, and if that's the case, Northrop Grumman may have to find an alternative rocket, most likely United Launch Alliance's Vulcan booster. Northrop has also studied the possibility of building its own Antares first stage in-house and possibly procuring engines for a re-tooled Antares rocket from Aerojet Rocketdyne.

Finally, the European Space Agency's small Vega and Vega C rockets use the RD-843 rocket for their upper-stage propulsion. This relatively small liquid-fueled engine is manufactured by Yuzhmash in Ukraine. It is not clear how many RD-843 engines Vega's European manufacturer has stockpiled.

Galileo launch

Europe has an independent satellite navigation system, Galileo, that went live in 2016 and was expected to become fully functional this year. The continent has spent \$10 billion developing the system, which

now has more than two dozen satellites in orbit. Two more are due to be launched on April 6 from Europe's spaceport in French Guiana.

Like a handful of previous Galileo missions, these satellites are due to launch on a Soyuz rocket. The Soyuz vehicle is already in French Guiana, with Russian and European technicians preparing it for launch. But will it happen now? The symbolism is not great, with Galileo satellites launching on a Russian rocket from a NATO country. Europe could choose to delay this launch and fly the Galileo satellites on an Ariane 6 rocket, eating the costs it has already paid Russia for the Soyuz.

Even if the Galileo launch does happen, the ongoing tensions will probably hasten the end of the partnership between Europe and Russia to use the low-cost Soyuz vehicle.

ExoMars

The European-led ExoMars mission has a long and fairly twisted history, which includes NASA's abrupt exit in 2012 for budgetary reasons. [Its Wikipedia article](#) has the nuts and bolts for those interested, but suffice it to say that ExoMars is now two decades old and of high priority to the European Space Agency. However, it also is now fully entangled in the Russian crisis.

After multiple delays, ExoMars is scheduled to launch in September on a Russian-built Proton rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Russia is also contributing a descent module that will help carry the European-built *Rosalind Franklin* rover down to the surface of Mars. Within a month or two, European technicians will need to go to Kazakhstan to begin the final integration of the spacecraft with the rocket.

The director-general of the European Space Agency, Josef Aschbacher, has said this partnership will continue for now. But in [a comment on Friday morning](#), he acknowledged that "the aggression continues to worsen in Ukraine." As a result, he will continue to consult with the member states of the space agency. "With ESA Member States, we will take any decisions needed," he said. "But for now, support for our missions and colleagues continues until further notice."

It seems likely that political pressure may increase on the ESA to move ExoMars off of a Russian rocket, but this would be a difficult decision. Almost certainly, it would necessitate another two-year delay, hundreds of millions of euros in costs, and finding a new descent module.

Overall, the ESA has 22 member states, including nations that border Russia, like Estonia. The agency's science missions require unanimous support from members to go ahead, so it seems unlikely that the ESA will partner deeply with Russia on future science missions.

OneWeb

One of the primary international customers of Russian launch services is OneWeb, a Britain-based satellite operator that is partly owned by the United Kingdom government and an Indian multinational company, Bharti Global. Since February 2020, the company has contracted for a dozen missions on the Soyuz rocket as it builds out its constellation of low Earth orbit broadband satellites.

Its next launch, OneWeb 14, is scheduled for March 4, and the satellites [have already arrived](#) in Kazakhstan for integration with the Soyuz rocket. Will it take place as scheduled? And with about one-third of its 648-satellite constellation still needing to be launched, will those missions go ahead on Soyuz rockets as planned?

So far, the company has not said anything publicly about the Russian invasion of Ukraine or its plans. OneWeb did not respond to a request for comment from Ars on Friday. Losing OneWeb would be a huge blow for Russia's rocket enterprise.

Supply chain

The global supply chain was already under stress in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and sanctions are likely to only worsen the problem for aerospace companies. Russia is a major supplier of

raw materials such as aluminum and titanium. VSMPO-Avisma, based in Russia, is the world's largest producer of titanium.

So far, the Biden administration sanctions [have not targeted](#) Russian companies that feed into global aluminum and titanium supplies, but that could change. If there is another round of harder-hitting sanctions, these kinds of industries could very well be targeted.

Already, space manufacturers in the United States and Europe are looking elsewhere for supplies of raw materials that are key ingredients for engines. Prices may rise, and supplies are likely to tighten as a result.

Future of Roscosmos

The future of Roscosmos is pretty bleak. The sprawling Russian space corporation has already faced significant budget cuts in recent years as it has lost funding from the United States for Soyuz seat purchases because of Crew Dragon's readiness and the fact that there have been no further RD-180 engine buys.

Last December, a Russian-language article in a state-sanctioned [media outlet declared](#) that Russia's space program was "rotting from within." Now there will be more pressures. The sanctions imposed on Russia this week will further impair the country's economy, which very likely will result in deeper cuts for the country's civil space program. And the Russian belligerence toward Europe will likely sever most, if not all, future cooperation with Western countries for human and scientific space exploration.

All of this translates into fewer resources pouring into the Russian space program and a further diminution of its activities. Without investment, the country is unlikely to be able to afford any semblance of deep-space activities or the creation of its own space station as a follow-on to the International Space Station.

This very likely will push Russia to cooperate further with China, where it has already [initiated discussions](#) about joining the Chinese lunar exploration program. But this Chinese lifeline will almost certainly come with costs. China will be interested in partnering with Russia to promote the idea that it is leading an international exploration program—but Russia should have no illusions about who will be driving the bus and who will be along for the ride.

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HEADLINE	02/27 Putin's invasion backfiring?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/27/russia-invasion-backfiring-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Even as he puts his nuclear forces on high alert and his troops close in on Kyiv, Russian President Vladimir Putin has reason to worry: His war on Ukraine appears to be backfiring.</p> <p>Unmasked as an unpredictable, even existential threat in the view of governments around the world, Putin has emerged as a dangerous symbol of tyranny, stoking the biggest European defense reassessment in decades. A reinvigorated NATO is emerging. Resurgent Western unity — wounded under former president Donald Trump — has enabled sanctions on Moscow that are some of the harshest ever imposed. With Germany suddenly off the fence in what is shaping up to be a historic realignment against Moscow, Putin faces new, as opposed to neutralized, security challenges in Russia's backyard.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has called Putin his "best friend," welcomed him to Beijing. But reportedly taken aback by the speed, scope and force of Russia's assault on Ukraine, Beijing is proving a more reluctant ally than Putin might have hoped, with Xi urging Putin to settle the conflict at the negotiating table. Delegations from Russia and Ukraine will meet near the Belarus border for their first talks since Russia launched its invasion, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said.</p> <p>Putin's supportive oligarchs live in a shrinking world — their foreign mansions, super yachts and billions under threat of seizure. "Russian-owned, Russian-registered or Russian-controlled aircraft" are banned</p>

from E.U. airspace. The Russian ruble is collapsing. Amid stirring images of the Russian bombardment — and the rise of Zelensky as a global cause celebre — foreign leaders who'd cozied up to Putin before the invasion are suffering repercussions at home.

In the United States, several senior Republican lawmakers typically quick to back Trump have [danced sidesteps](#) after he praised Putin's "genius." Even some of Moscow's closest international allies, including Venezuela and Cuba, are offering nuanced responses, betraying unease with the modern precedent set by Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty.

"Putin wants to establish a Russian empire," a newly steeled German Chancellor [Olaf Scholz](#) declared Sunday in parliament. The question is, he continued, "whether we can summon the strength to set boundaries to warmongers like Putin."

Nowhere is the about-face on Russia more full than in Germany, where the rumbling of Putin's tanks and the toll of his missiles on Ukrainian cities is jolting awake a sleeping giant.

Since reunification, Germany has shrunk from geopolitical confrontation and sought a careful relationship with Moscow based on post-World War II penance and energy security through Russian gas.

On Saturday, the normally reluctant Germans agreed to target a number of Russian banks, cutting them off the vital SWIFT global network that allows international movement of funds. But as an outpouring of [100,000 demonstrators](#) fanned out from Berlin's Brandenburg Gate to decry the Russian invasion on Sunday, [Scholz went far further](#), unveiling a previously unthinkable surge in defense spending.

As part of a remarkable security rethink, German military spending will get a one-off spike of \$110 billion, about twice last year's defense budget. Scholz also pledged Germany's annual military spending would immediately begin to exceed a 2 percent of gross domestic product target for NATO nations — a level Berlin was not projected to reach until 2024. It shows how the Russian threat seems to have crystallized for Germans more over the last four days than in the last two decades combined.

Over the weekend, Berlin also cut through its long-standing resistance to sending weapons to conflict zones, authorizing the dispatch of 1,000 shoulder-launched antitank rockets and 500 surface-to-air Stinger missiles to Ukraine. This from a country [ridiculed only last month](#) for a muted response involving a gift of helmets to Ukrainian forces.

"There has been an awakening, not just by the political class, but also by ordinary voters," Marcel Dirsus, a German political scientist and fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel, [told my colleagues](#).

In Beijing, where earlier this month Putin and Xi issued a 5,300-word joint statement outlining a Russian-Chinese effort to counter Washington's reach, "many Chinese officials seemed startled that Russian President Vladimir Putin would move so far so fast — and so forcefully," Melinda Liu [wrote](#) in Foreign Policy. "Beijing's rhetoric has become less overtly supportive of Putin," she noted. A senior Biden administration official [pointed my colleagues](#) to media reports this week stating that China had also restricted financing for Russian commodity purchases, suggesting limits to Beijing's support.

Building on historic ties to authoritarian regimes and more recent vaccine diplomacy, Russia accelerated its [courting of Latin America in recent weeks](#) — seeing economic and military cooperation there as strategic warning to Washington. This month, leaders of South America's two largest nations, Brazil and Argentina, held lovefests with Putin in Moscow. Now, both of them — along with other global Putin cheerleaders — are facing awkward moments, with signs of at least some diplomatic backtracking.

"We are in solidarity with Russia," Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro declared in Moscow during a meeting with Putin just eight days before the invasion.

After Thursday's invasion, Bolsonaro's vice president, Hamilton Mourão, seemed to indirectly call out his boss. Saying the "Western world" was repeating the 1938 mistake of giving space to Adolf Hitler, the former Brazilian army general called for more than sanctions.

"The use of force is needed, a support for Ukraine," [he said](#). "That's my view. If the Western world just lets Ukraine fall, Bulgaria will be next, then the Baltic States, and so on. Just as Hitler's Germany did in the 1930s."

Bolsonaro publicly rebuked his No. 2. But despite a certain tiptoeing around Russian aggression from Brazil's Foreign Ministry, the country still stood with the 11 members of the U.N. Security Council that voted in favor of a resolution to denounce the Russian invasion — a measure that Moscow vetoed.

On Feb. 3, Argentina's President Alberto Fernández, also meeting with Putin in Moscow, heralded a future with Russia as an antidote to U.S. power. But, as images of fleeing Ukrainian refugees and Russian missile strikes began rippling across social media Thursday, Fernandez called for Moscow to "end" action in Ukraine. His reluctance to say much more [sparked an influential group](#) of opposition politicians and intellectuals to demand he make "a clear and forceful condemnation" and show "the immediate alignment of our country with the West."

"I think this invasion, and all the images that are just so egregious, are going to cost these leaders, and that's why they've backtracked a little bit," Michael Shifter, president of the Inter-American Dialogue, told me. "Any kind of sympathy with Russia is not sustainable with the public opinions in Brazil or Argentina right now."

Putin also sought to boost long-standing strategic ties to communist Cuba and the left-wing authoritarian states of Venezuela and Nicaragua. Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro, after meeting with senior Russian officials two weeks ago, pledged new and powerful "military cooperation" with Moscow.

Maduro has blamed NATO for Putin's woes and criticized Western sanctions. But a government statement Thursday ventured close to suggesting cooler heads were needed on both sides, calling for a "peaceful resolution" to the conflict and "a return" to diplomacy to "avoid escalation."

Even communist Cuba seemed to hide a nugget of criticism inside a lengthy statement blaming Washington and NATO for Putin's "use of force." [Havana's Foreign Ministry](#) still described the Russian action as "the nonobservance of legal principles and international norms."

"You're not going to see Venezuela or Nicaragua break with Russia over this, but I think they are sensitive to the violation of principles they hold dear, of national sovereignty and non interference," Shifter said. "They have the U.S. in mind. The theory that this gives the United States free rein to do what it wants in its own backyard in Latin America."

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HEADLINE	02/27 Space industry booming in Puget Sound
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/space-industry-booming-around-puget-sound/
GIST	<p>The Jet City's space industry is booming.</p> <p>That was the upshot of a new economic impact review conducted by the Puget Sound Regional Council, a public-private economic development organization. The review, released last week, found the region's space industry has doubled its economic impact in recent years, and accounted for \$4.6 billion in economic activity in 2021.</p> <p>Key to the growth was Jeff Bezos. Blue Origin, the Bezos-founded spacecraft maker headquartered in Kent, emerged as the region's major player. The privately held company in 2020 opened the O'Neill Building, a 232,885-square-foot facility in Kent that can accommodate 1,500 employees.</p>

But new satellite communications work by Amazon-owned Project Kuiper accounted for significant growth, as did its key competitors, Elon Musk's satellite venture Starlink and LeoStella, a Tukwila-based satellite maker owned in part by two European aerospace giants.

Another Kent firm, startup Starfish Space, developing a space junk collector secured \$7 million in funding last year, while other smaller firms are developing what's described as a "satellite rideshare" business and interplanetary spacecraft.

All told, the industry supports 13,103 jobs and \$1.6 billion in labor income in the region, according to the regional council report. Employment and economic activity driven by the regional space economy has doubled since 2018, according to the report.

"Supporting the commercial space sector is an opportunity to expand on the region's long aerospace history and build resiliency into the region's economy," Axel Strakeljahn, a Port of Bremerton commissioner serving on the regional council, said in a statement.

The Puget Sound space economy still lags what the regional council's analysts described as "traditional space clusters" in Florida, Texas and across the Southeast. Los Angeles and, due to governmental largesse, Washington, D.C., also boast large and growing space economies.

Part of the problem is geographic — Washington state's latitude isn't conducive to shooting rockets into space, because they need more fuel to turn on to a stable orbit. The regional council also found the industry is decentralizing; while large rockets still require equally large manufacturing facilities, it doesn't take a huge workforce and plant to make satellites, spacecraft components or the software that powers them.

The regional council advocates for greater venture capital access for space-related startups, and building the supply chain and talent pipeline servicing the industry. It's also seeking expanded tax incentives for spacecraft and satellite manufacturers. The analysis was performed by BERK consulting and funded by the Aerospace Futures Alliance, an Everett-based trade group.

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HEADLINE	02/27 NWS flood watch: heavy rain western Wash.
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/weather/heavy-rain-western-washington-flooding/281-3a051ca9-f1a8-4cf5-83c1-7fd7218cbd71
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Heavy rain expected to continue through at least Monday could cause flooding throughout western Washington.</p> <p>A Flood Watch is in effect for much of the region through Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>The National Weather Service (NWS) warns flooding of rivers, creeks, streams, and other low-lying and flood-prone areas is possible. Rivers flowing off the Olympics could begin flooding Sunday night. Those flowing off the Cascades could see flooding Monday, according to the NWS.</p> <p>Rainfall totals between Sunday night and Tuesday are expected to be "considerable," with up to 8 inches in the Olympics and 5 inches in the Cascades, according to the NWS. The coast could see up to 3 inches. Two inches could fall in the interior lowlands from Everett south.</p> <p>A warm front moving in will cause snow levels to rise up to 8,000 feet, according to the NWS. An Avalanche Warning is in effect for the Cascades due to the heavy rain, snow, and warming temperatures. That includes the western slopes from the Canadian border to the Columbia River, including Stevens, Snoqualmie, and White passes.</p>

	<p>In addition to the heavy rainfall, breezy condition are expected. The strongest winds will be associated with the warm front as it moves onshore Monday morning, according to the NWS. Guests on the coast could reach 50 mph.</p> <p>Heavier rainfall could ease by Tuesday morning. However, light rain is in the forecast through Wednesday, according to the NWS.</p> <p>A cold front will move in by Wednesday night, dropping snow levels back to some of the higher passes.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Seattle eviction moratorium expires
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattles-eviction-moratorium-expires/281-e542a3da-a397-4035-a0fe-8644b4ec9fdb
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — On Monday, Seattle's eviction moratorium expires two years after it was enacted. On Feb. 22, the Seattle City Council voted 5-3 against a proposal to extend the moratorium for the eighth time since March 2020. The vote followed an announcement from Mayor Bruce Harrell that it would end Feb. 28.</p> <p>Councilmember Kshama Sawant called for the moratorium to continue through the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency. That end date has not been determined. Sawant argued the city is on the edge of an eviction crisis.</p> <p>However, Harrell's office said it's difficult to track the number of people who have benefited from the moratorium.</p> <p>Earlier in February, Harrell announced a final two-week extension to push the moratorium's expiration date to the end of the month and directed the Office of Housing to distribute more than \$25 million to support vulnerable renters and small landlords.</p> <p>Funding for rental assistance for all of King County is also running out. The county will stop accepting new applications for the Eviction Prevention and Rental Assistance Program at 11:59 p.m. on Monday. Funds are running out with 11,245 households still assigned to a provider and 10,943 applications that have pre-registered and are waiting for assistance.</p> <p>The county said it received an additional \$66.5 million for the EPRAP program from the state's Department of Commerce. That money will be used to fund remaining applications but it will not serve all pre-registered households.</p> <p>The Housing Justice Project estimates 5,000 to 7,000 households could be left behind when funding runs out. Witter said running out of money isn't the only problem.</p> <p>Housing advocates said the city and county should be looking at a long-term solution as rental assistance and the eviction moratorium expire.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Spokane rally held in support of Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/politics/spokane-rally-in-support-of-ukraine-as-russian-invasion-continues/293-c12259fe-a6a5-475d-9af1-4ea2133a2eb5
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Waving Ukrainian flags and holding signs, a large group of demonstrators gathered in Downtown Spokane, Saturday afternoon.</p> <p>The group stood in front of the Lincoln statue to protest against the Russian Invasion on Ukraine that has lead to the bombing of Ukraine's capitol city and over 100-thousand people fleeing from violence into neighboring countries.</p>

	<p>Spokane is home to more than 30,000 Ukrainian Americans.</p> <p>Saturday morning, Spokane Mayor Nadine Woodward issued a proclamation condemning the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The proclamation declares that the City of Spokane stands with the Slavic Community against the attack on democracy in Ukraine.</p> <p>Similar protests were held across the world today. From Texas to Washington D.C. protesters condemned the invasion of Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Pacific Northwest faces 'atmospheric river'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/27/us/atmospheric-river-pacific-northwest.html
GIST	<p>The Pacific Northwest is bracing for what meteorologists call an “atmospheric river,” a stream of water vapor that is set to arrive from the Pacific Ocean on Sunday night and bring heavy rains and flooding through Wednesday.</p> <p>The brunt of the storm system was expected in the mountains of northern Oregon and Western Washington, where up to seven inches of rain might flood the rivers that flow off the mountain ranges, said Dustin Guy, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Seattle.</p> <p>“Amounts like that combined with pretty high snow levels can push our rivers up significantly,” Mr. Guy said.</p> <p>It was too early on Sunday afternoon to know which rivers might have the most flooding, so the Weather Service had not yet posted any flood warnings, Mr. Guy said.</p> <p>Parts of Oregon and Western Washington were under a winter weather advisory as heavy rain was expected from Sunday night into Tuesday morning, according to the Weather Service in Seattle. Lighter rainfall is in the forecast through Wednesday, with possible flooding beginning late on Monday or on Tuesday.</p> <p>Gusty winds and “distant energetic ocean waves” were expected along the coast, according to the Weather Service in Portland, Ore.</p> <p>“Y’all thought winter was over didn’t you?” the Weather Service in Seattle said on Twitter on Sunday morning. “Well it’s not.”</p> <p>It is “definitely not unheard-of” to have an atmospheric river in the West at this time of year, with the end of the wet season just weeks away, Mr. Guy said.</p> <p>An atmospheric river is a trail of water vapor that moves through the sky much the way a river moves over land, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.</p> <p>Think of it as “a long ribbon of very moist air being aimed right at us,” Mr. Guy said.</p> <p>The atmospheric river this week will be at least the second one to pummel the western United States in the past several months.</p> <p>In October, an atmospheric river converged with a bomb cyclone to unleash heavy rains in the San Francisco Bay Area. About 100,000 customers lost power as landslides and dangerous road conditions were reported in areas across Northern California.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 China’s nuclear umbrella pact w/Ukraine
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SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/27/putin-threat-tests-chinas-nuclear-umbrella-pact-uk/
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Moscow's military to raise the alert status of its large nuclear forces on Sunday, and the threat will test a 2012 agreement that calls on China to provide a nuclear deterrent umbrella for Ukraine.</p> <p>Chinese President Xi Jinping and then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich signed the agreement on Dec. 5, 2012, promising that China's nuclear forces would protect Ukraine from nuclear threats.</p> <p>The bilateral treaty described the two states as "strategic partners."</p> <p>"China pledges unconditionally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the nuclear-free Ukraine and China further pledges to provide Ukraine nuclear security guarantee when Ukraine encounters an invasion involving nuclear weapons or Ukraine is under threat of a nuclear invasion," a joint statement on the pact said.</p> <p>A Chinese Embassy spokesman did not immediately return an email request for comment on whether China will invoke the agreement in providing a nuclear deterrent for Ukraine.</p> <p>Nearly two decades earlier, Ukraine voluntarily gave up the nuclear weapons it inherited upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which would've been the world's third-biggest arsenal, and joined the global treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-weapons state.</p> <p>As Russian military forces bogged down in efforts to pacify Ukraine rapidly using a three-pronged military offensive, Mr. Putin said Sunday that "aggressive statements" by NATO prompted the directive.</p> <p>"Western countries aren't only taking unfriendly actions against our country in the economic sphere, but top officials from leading NATO members made aggressive statements regarding our country," Mr. Putin said in comments broadcast on Russian television.</p> <p>If the higher alert status is detected by U.S. and western intelligence agencies, U.S. strategic forces – missiles, submarines and bombers – would almost certainly respond by raising their alert status.</p> <p>The nuclear alert is part of a new Russian military doctrine called "escalate to de-escalate" that reflects Moscow's weaker conventional forces and stronger nuclear power.</p> <p>U.S. defense officials have said the new doctrine means Russia's military will more rapidly escalate to the use of nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear arms or possibly strategic weapons, in a regional conflict.</p> <p>At the Pentagon, a senior defense official said the United States "had no reason to doubt" the ordering of a higher nuclear alert status.</p> <p>The official said the action represented an unnecessary "escalatory" threat since Russia is not facing any nuclear dangers from NATO or the west.</p> <p>"And escalatory because it is clearly potentially putting at play forces that if there's a miscalculation could — could — make things much, much more dangerous," the official said.</p> <p>Regarding whether U.S. nuclear forces have gone on a higher alert status in response, the senior official said "we do not talk about the specifics of our strategic deterrent posture."</p> <p>"I would just tell you that we remain confident in our ability to defend ourselves and our allies, and our partners, and that includes in the strategic deterrent realm, and that is as far as I'm going to go on that question."</p>

The increased nuclear danger comes as the office of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said talks between Ukrainian and Russian officials would take place at the Belarusian border.

China's government has tacitly supported the Russian military operation against Ukraine by not condemning the military aggression and repeatedly announcing that Moscow had "legitimate security concerns" with Ukraine.

The Biden administration also shared U.S. intelligence with Chinese officials in the run-up the conflict in a failed bid to gain Beijing's support for pressure on Mr. Putin not to invade Ukraine.

Instead of helping the west, China's government shared the intelligence on Russian troop deployments with Moscow, highlighting the growing alliance between the two countries.

Ukraine developed a close arms relationship with China since it achieved independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

China bought an unfinished aircraft carrier from Ukraine for \$20 million in the 1990s and turned it into the People's Liberation Army's first aircraft carrier.

Ukraine also has sold jets and aircraft engines to China, and provided design information that was incorporated into Chinese Y-series military transport and surveillance aircraft.

Former State Department policy official Miles Yu, who first disclosed the China-Ukraine nuclear pact, said the nation most likely to threaten the use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine is Russia, another strategic partner of Beijing.

"In the hypothetical scenario of a Russian nuclear threat against Moscow's former satellite Ukraine, would China keep its pledge to confront Moscow with its nuclear weapons?" Mr. Yu stated.

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HEADLINE	02/27 EU, Canada close airspace Russia planes
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/27/europe-canada-close-their-airspace-to-russian-airp/
GIST	<p>Europe and Canada said Sunday they would close their airspace to Russian airlines after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, raising the pressure on the United States to do the same.</p> <p>"We are shutting down the EU airspace for Russians," said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.</p> <p>Canada's transport minister, Omar Alghabra, said his nation was closing its airspace to all Russian planes to hold the country accountable for an unprovoked attack on its neighbor.</p> <p>The European Union action came after many of its member countries had said they were barring Russian planes or planned to do so by Sunday night.</p> <p>Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo tweeted that European skies are "open for those who connect people, not for those who seek to brutally aggress."</p> <p>"There is no room in Dutch airspace for a regime that applies unnecessary and brutal violence," Mark Harbers, the Netherlands' minister of infrastructure and waterworks, said on Twitter.</p> <p>A handful of European nations including Spain, Greece and Turkey had resisted closing their airspace before von der Leyen's announcement.</p> <p>Robert Mann, an aviation consultant in New York, said the moves by the European Union and Canada would put added pressure on the U.S. to also bar Russian flights.</p>

“It is difficult to understand why we are last to move, both operationally and financially,” he said.

Russia has responded by banning flights from several European countries. Russian airline S7 suspended flights to Europe. On Sunday afternoon U.S. time, a Moscow-New York flight by Russian national carrier Aeroflot turned back after passing over Norway, according to flight-tracking services. The plane had been routed to fly over Canada.

Growing tension between Russia and western nations over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have so far had a modest impact on airlines, which are trying to recover from huge losses since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Airlines in the U.S. and Europe are expecting to pack planes with transatlantic vacationers this summer. Helene Becker, an airline analyst for Cowen, said Friday that she continued to expect strong travel demand from the U.S. to western Europe, but travel to eastern Europe “will be curtailed until there is some resolution or some assurance it won’t spread to other countries.”

The global tension is already costing some airlines more money to reroute flights. An American Airlines flight from Delhi to New York has been stopping in Bangor, Maine, to refuel because its new route, skirting to the south of Russia, is longer.

Ian Petchenik, a spokesman for tracking service Flightradar 24, said “dozens” of cargo flights from Anchorage, Alaska, that would ordinarily pass over eastern Russia were being rerouted. “They will take a fuel penalty,” he said.

Mann, the aviation consultant, estimated that passenger flights forced to reroute could add between \$4,000 and \$12,000 per hour in costs, depending on the size of the plane and the price of fuel.

“Some routings will simply become uneconomic or impractical,” he said.

Cargo carrier FedEx said Sunday it has temporarily suspended flights to Russia. The company said in a statement that it continued to provide service inside Russia and between Russia and other countries “where conditions allow.”

Last week, shortly after Russia’s invasion, Delta Air Lines suspended a partnership with Aeroflot in which the airlines sold seats on each other’s flights.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Ukraine war: sanctions-hit ruble crashes
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/ukraine-war-sanctions-hit-russian-rouble-crashes-as-zelenskiy-speaks-of-crucial-24-hours
GIST	<p>The Russian rouble has crashed more than 40% after trading began on Monday in the wake of unprecedented international sanctions against the country’s financial system over Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The news came as Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy told the British prime minister that the next 24 hours would be “crucial” for his country and amid reports that a column of Russian tanks was heading for the capital.</p> <p>With restrictions in force limiting how much the Russian central bank can do to prop up the currency, the rouble plunged 41.5% to a record low when the markets opened, sinking to as low as 119 per dollar from 83.7 at its close on Friday. It recovered a little ground later on Monday to stand at 107 to the dollar, a fall of 28%.</p>

Analysts at Rabobank in Singapore said that Monday could see a “complete collapse in the rouble” after the asset freeze on the Central Bank of Russia means it cannot sell foreign currency reserves to support the rouble.

The economic turmoil unfolded amid fresh signs of nuclear brinkmanship by Vladimir Putin and his allies. Early on Monday, Belarus claimed that a referendum on Sunday had seen enough public support for constitutional changes that would revoke the country’s neutrality and its nuclear-free status. The changes would allow Russia to station nuclear weapons on Belarusian soil.

Putin earlier ordered his military to put its nuclear deterrence forces on high alert, a move criticised by the US as a “totally unacceptable” escalation, and as [“dangerous rhetoric”](#) by Nato’s secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg.

Zelenskiy told British prime minister Boris Johnson on Sunday evening that the next 24 hours would be a “crucial period” for his country. Johnson “said he would do all he could to help ensure defensive aid from the UK and allies reached Ukraine”, a No 10 spokesperson said.

Other developments include:

- Belarus is reportedly preparing to send soldiers into Ukraine in support of the Russian invasion. [The Washington Post](#) spoke to an unnamed US administration official on Sunday evening who said the deployment could begin as soon as Monday. “It’s very clear Minsk is now an extension of the Kremlin,” they said. Kyiv Independent reported the move was likely after Putin failed to secure a swift victory. The Guardian has not been able to independently verify the claim.
- Blasts were heard in the capital Kyiv and in the major city of Kharkiv early on Monday morning, Ukraine’s state service of special communications reported.
- Ukraine’s interior ministry said 352 Ukrainian civilians have been killed during Russia’s invasion, including 14 children. It says an additional 1,684 people, including 116 children, have been wounded.
- Ukraine has agreed to send a delegation to meet Russian representatives on the border with Belarus, which would be the two sides’ first public contact since war erupted. Zelenskiy said he was not confident that any progress would be made, but that he would try. “I’ll say frankly, like always, that I don’t believe in the result of this meeting,” he said. “But let’s try, so that no citizen of Ukraine would have any doubt that I, as president, tried to stop the war when there was even a chance.”
- A rare emergency special session of the UN general assembly is due to be held on Monday in response to Russia’s invasion of [Ukraine](#), marking the first time in 40 years the security council has made such a request.

The new sanctions against Russia, which also mean that some banks are now [barred from the Swift international payments system](#), were likely to deal a devastating blow to the Russian economy and make it hard for Russian banks and companies to access the international financial system.

Signs of the first commercial casualties came on Monday when the European Central Bank (ECB) said that Sberbank Europe, a fully owned subsidiary of Sberbank [Russia](#), which in turn is majority owned by the Russian state, is failing or likely to fail along with its Croatian and Slovenian units.

“Sberbank [Europe](#) AG and its subsidiaries experienced significant deposit outflows as a result of the reputational impact of geopolitical tensions,” the ECB said in a statement. There were “no available measures with a realistic chance” of solving its liquidity crisis, the bank said.

The fall of the rouble marked the beginning of what promised to be a turbulent day on financial markets all over the world. The US dollar gained against all other currencies, Brent crude oil futures soared another 4% to more than \$102 a barrel. Stock markets in Asia fell on fears of a prolonged and intensifying conflict in Ukraine, while the German Dax is set to plunge 3.75% at the open and the FTSE100 more than 2%.

Russians waited in long queues at ATMs on Sunday, worried that the measures by western countries to punish Putin's invasion would trigger cash shortages and disrupt payments, bringing home the gravity of the crisis for many ordinary Russians.

"The situation is dire for the Russian economy," said Christopher Vecchio, senior strategist with IG Group's DailyFX.com in New York. "Now unable to import or export goods and services thanks to the Swift sanctions, unable to sell foreign currency reserves thanks to the [central bank] asset freeze, and a Russian economy ringfenced from the global financial system, a currency crisis has emerged for Russia. High inflation is coming, as is an immediate lurch into recession."

"It will be something we have not seen before," said Sergei Guriev, economics professor at France's Sciences Po and former European Bank for Reconstruction and Development chief economist.

"Sanctioning the central bank is unprecedented," said Maria Shagina of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs and the Geneva International Sanctions Network. "I think for one of the largest economies in the world – the size matters here. Previously it was only Iran, Venezuela, Syria that were under a maximum-pressure campaign."

On Sunday evening, Russian state TV hosts were exhorting their listeners to hold the line despite the tough economic times ahead, describing a period of economic isolation and autarky that recalls some of the world's most troubled pariah states.

"I know some of you are finding this tough," said Vladimir Solovyov, a Russian TV host who was sanctioned last week. "We'll overcome it all, we'll endure it all. We'll rebuild our own economy from scratch, an independent banking system, manufacturing and industry. We'll rely on ourselves."

Russia's central bank announced a range of measures on Sunday to try to support domestic markets and limit the damage dealt by sanctions.

The central bank said it would resume buying gold on the domestic market and provide unlimited liquidity for domestic markets in order to keep the financial system afloat.

It also said it would ease requirements for collateral to get loans, and order institutions to block attempts by foreign clients to sell Russian bonds and stocks in order to try to keep prices stable.

The steps came after western allies ratcheted up sanctions on Saturday, including blocking certain banks from the Swift international payments system and targeting the Russian central bank, committing to imposing restrictive measures that would keep it from deploying its international reserves to undermine sanctions.

The Russian central bank said it would continue to monitor changes in currency positions "in order to guarantee the normal functioning of the currency and money markets and the financial stability of lending institutions".

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HEADLINE	02/24 Russians thought they knew Putin
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/24/world/europe/putin-russia-ukraine.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — Russians thought they knew their president.</p> <p>They were wrong.</p> <p>And by Thursday, it appeared too late to do anything about it.</p>

For most of his 22-year rule, Vladimir V. Putin presented an aura of calm determination at home — of an ability to astutely manage risk to navigate the world’s biggest country through treacherous shoals. His attack on Ukraine negated that image, and revealed him as an altogether different leader: one dragging the nuclear superpower he helms into a war with no foreseeable conclusion, one that by all appearances will end Russia’s attempts over its three post-Soviet decades to find a place in a peaceful world order.

Russians awoke in shock after they learned that Mr. Putin, in an address to the nation that aired before 6 a.m., had ordered a full-scale assault against what Russians of all political stripes often refer to as their “brotherly nation.” Liberal-leaning public figures who for years tried to compromise with and adapt to Mr. Putin’s creeping authoritarianism found themselves reduced to posting on social media about their opposition to a war they had no way to stop.

And a number of people in Moscow’s foreign policy establishment, where analysts overwhelmingly characterized Mr. Putin’s military buildup around Ukraine as an elaborate and astute bluff in recent months, admitted on Thursday that they had monumentally misjudged a man they had spent decades studying.

“Everything that we believed turned out to be wrong,” said one such analyst, insisting on anonymity because he was at a loss over what to say.

“I don’t understand the motivations, the goals or the possible results,” said another. “What is happening is very strange.”

“I’ve always tried to understand Putin,” a third analyst, Tatiana Stanovaya of the political analysis firm R. Politik, reflected. But now, she said, the usefulness of logic seemed at a limit. “He has become less pragmatic, and more emotional.”

On state television, Mr. Putin’s most powerful propaganda tool, the Kremlin tried to project an air of normalcy. The state-run news media characterized Thursday’s invasion as not a war, but a “special military operation” limited to eastern Ukraine. Mr. Putin was shown meeting with the visiting prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, as though he were still shrewdly carrying on his day-to-day business.

“This is not the beginning of a war,” Maria V. Zakharova, the foreign ministry’s spokeswoman, said on television. “Our desire is to prevent developments that could escalate into a global war.”

Meanwhile, Russia’s stock market plummeted by 35 percent and A.T.M.s ran short of dollars. On the country’s internet, still mostly uncensored, Russians saw their vaunted military sow carnage in a country in which millions of them had relatives and friends.

Many of them had bought into the Kremlin’s narrative that theirs was a peace-loving country, and Mr. Putin a careful and calculating leader. After all, many Russians still believe, it was Mr. Putin who lifted their country out of the poverty and chaos of the 1990s and made it into a place with a decent standard of living and worthy of international respect.

“It’s so strange that Russia could attack anyone,” a 60-year-old pensioner said on Thursday as she walked through the breathtaking Moscow park, Zaryadye, that international architects designed ahead of the soccer World Cup Russia hosted in 2018. “This has never happened before in history.”

Like many on Thursday, she declined to reveal her name in the fear that the outbreak of war could bring with it a new crackdown on people’s freedoms.

One of the country’s ever-dwindling number of rights activists, Marina Litvinovich, called for an antiwar protest to be held in Moscow on Thursday evening, and was promptly arrested. Police buses and riot police descended on Pushkin Square, where she had urged people to gather. An actor posted a directive from his state-run Moscow theater claiming that “any negative commentary” about the war would be seen by the authorities as “treason.”

In the last three months, as American officials warned that Mr. Putin's troop buildup was a prelude to an invasion, Russians dismissed such talk as a Western failure to understand their president's fundamental determination to manage risk and avoid rash moves with unpredictable consequences. And with leading opposition figures imprisoned or exiled, there were few figures with the influence to organize an antiwar movement.

Some public figures with ties to the government reversed course, though they recognized it was too late. Ivan Urgant, the most prominent late-night comedian on state television, had ridiculed the idea of a looming war on his show earlier this month. On Thursday he posted a black square on Instagram along with the words: "Fear and pain."

Ksenia Sobchak, another television celebrity whose father was mayor of St. Petersburg and a 1990s mentor to Mr. Putin, posted on Instagram that from now on she would only "believe in the worst possible scenarios" about her country's future. Days earlier, she had praised Mr. Putin as a "grown-up, adequate politician" compared to his Ukrainian and American counterparts.

"We are now all trapped in this situation," she wrote on Thursday. "There is no exit. We Russians will spend many years digging out from the consequences of this day."

During the pandemic, analysts had noticed a change in Mr. Putin — a man who isolated himself in a bubble of social distancing without parallel among Western leaders. In isolation, he appeared to become more aggrieved and more emotional, and increasingly spoke about his mission in stark historical terms. His public remarks descended ever deeper into distorted historiography as he spoke of the need to right perceived historical wrongs suffered by Russia over the centuries at the hands of the West.

The political scientist Gleb O. Pavlovsky, a close adviser to Mr. Putin until falling out with him in 2011, said he was stunned by the president's dark description of Ukraine as a dire threat to Russia in his hourlong speech to the nation on Monday.

"I have no clue where he got all that — he seems to be reading something totally strange," Mr. Pavlovsky said. "He's become an isolated man, more isolated than Stalin was."

Ms. Stanovaya, the analyst, said she now felt that Mr. Putin's heightened obsession with history in recent years had become key to understanding his motivation. After all, the war against Ukraine appeared impossible to explain strategically, since it had no clear resolution and would inevitably only increase anti-Russian sentiment abroad and escalate Russia's confrontation with the NATO alliance.

"Putin has brought himself to a place in which he sees it as more important, more interesting, more compelling to fight for restoring historical justice than for Russia's strategic priorities," Ms. Stanovaya said. "This morning, I realized that a certain shift has taken place."

She said that by all appearances, the ruling elite around Mr. Putin did not realize that Thursday's war was coming, and was uncertain about how to respond. Beyond state television personalities and pro-Kremlin politicians, few prominent Russians spoke out in support of the war.

But that, she said, did not mean that Mr. Putin risked any kind of palace coup, given his tight hold on the country's sprawling security apparatus and his expansive crackdown on dissent over the last year.

"He can still act for a long time," Ms. Stanovaya said. "Inside Russia, he is practically secure from political risk."

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HEADLINE	02/27 Does Putin alert change risk nuclear war?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/explainer-does-putins-alert-change-risk-of-nuclear-war/

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin’s implied threat to turn the Ukraine war into a broader nuclear conflict presents President Joe Biden with choices rarely contemplated in the atomic age, including whether to raise the alert level of U.S. nuclear forces.

This turn of events is all the more remarkable for the fact that less than a year ago, Putin and Biden issued a statement at their Geneva summit that seemed more in keeping with the idea that the threat of nuclear war was a Cold War relic. “Nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,” they agreed.

Putin on Sunday told his top defense and military officials to put nuclear forces in a “special regime of combat duty,” but it was not immediately clear how that might have changed the status of Russian nuclear forces, if at all. Russia, like the United States, keeps its land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, on a high state of readiness at all times, and it is believed that Russian submarine-based nuclear missiles, like America’s, are similarly postured.

Putin indicated he was responding to economic sanctions imposed by the United States and other Western nations in recent days for his invasion of Ukraine, as well as “aggressive statements regarding our country,” which he did not further explain.

The Biden administration was assessing Putin’s move, which it said unnecessarily escalates an already dangerous conflict. In fact, Putin’s words amount to the kind of threat rarely heard even during the Cold War period, when vastly larger nuclear arsenals of the United States and the former Soviet Union threatened the world with nuclear Armageddon.

HOW DOES THIS CHANGE THE RISK OF NUCLEAR WAR?

U.S. officials, while disturbed by Putin’s words, indicated they did not know what he intends. But it is so rare for an American or Russian leader to issue an implied nuclear threat, particularly in the current context of the war in Ukraine, that the risk of it going nuclear cannot be dismissed. In Russia, like in the United States, the president has sole authority to order a nuclear strike.

The United States and Russia have the two largest nuclear arsenals in the world, by far. They include weapons that can be delivered by aircraft, submarine and land-based ballistic missiles. The only time in history that nuclear weapons have been used in combat was when the United States twice bombed Japan in August 1945, and at that point the U.S. had a global monopoly on nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union successfully tested its first bomb in 1949.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, said Putin’s order to put his nuclear forces on higher alert was regrettable but not a complete surprise given his previous implied threats against any nation that tried to stop him in Ukraine.

“Inserting nuclear weapons into the Ukraine war equation at this point is extremely dangerous, and the United States, President Biden, and NATO must act with extreme restraint” and not respond in kind, Kimball said. “This is a very dangerous moment in this crisis, and we need to urge our leaders to walk back from the nuclear brink.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS ON ALERT?

According to U.S. nuclear doctrine, the weapons’ alert level is central to their role in deterring attack. The idea is that being prepared to respond on short notice makes an enemy less likely to attack in the first place and risk retaliation that would do incalculable damage.

A counterargument is that having ICBMs, which the Pentagon calls the most responsive portion of its nuclear arsenal, on high alert during a crisis compresses a president’s decision-making room and leaves open the possibility of ordering them launched in response to a false alarm. The 400 deployed U.S. ICBMs are armed at all times.

Some arms control experts have argued for taking ICBMs off high alert by separating the missiles from their nuclear warheads. But in a crisis, perhaps like the one implied by Putin's alert order Sunday, a decision to re-arm the missiles would be taken as an escalatory move that could make the crisis even worse.

During the Cold War, U.S. and Russian weapons were not only more numerous but also in a higher state of readiness. President George H.W. Bush in 1991 took the historic step of ordering U.S. nuclear-capable strategic bombers off alert as part of a broader move to reverse the nuclear arms race. The bombers have remained off alert ever since.

HOW HAS THE UNITED STATES RESPONDED TO PUTIN SO FAR?

There is no evidence that the Biden administration has reciprocated in any sense to Putin's announcement that he was ordering his nuclear forces in a "special regime of combat duty" — perhaps in part because it was unclear what that means in practical terms.

Nor was there word from Washington of evidence that Putin had taken worrying steps such as loading nuclear weapons on all or a portion of Russia's nuclear-capable air fleet or sending additional ballistic missile submarines to sea.

In addition to his strategic nuclear force, Putin has at least a couple thousand so-called nonstrategic nuclear weapons, such as shorter-range ballistic and cruise missiles. They are called nonstrategic because they cannot reach U.S. territory. But that is little comfort for the countries in Europe that are within range of those weapons. The United States has about 200 nonstrategic weapons in Europe; they are bombs that would be delivered by Europe-based aircraft.

For years, some U.S. officials have worried that Putin, if faced with the prospect of losing a war in Europe, might resort to the use of nonstrategic nuclear weapons, thinking it would quickly bring the conflict to an end on his terms.

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HEADLINE	02/27 NKorea tests cameras for spy satellite
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/north-korea-says-it-tests-systems-for-spy-satellite/
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Monday it tested cameras to be installed on a spy satellite, a suggestion that it'll likely soon conduct a banned long-range rocket launch to modernize its weapons arsenal and apply more pressure on the Biden administration.</p> <p>The United Nations and others view a satellite launch by North Korea as a cover for tests of missile technology, as ballistic missiles and rockets in satellite lift-offs share similar bodies, engines and other technology. Concerns about a North Korean satellite launch flared after it recently threatened to lift a four-year moratorium on big weapons tests to cope with what it called U.S. hostility.</p> <p>The official Korean Central News Agency said Sunday's test involved cameras for a reconnaissance satellite conducting vertical and oblique photography of a specific area of Earth. It said the test "is of great significance in developing the reconnaissance satellite" and released photos of the Korean Peninsula that appeared to be taken from space.</p> <p>North Korea didn't directly acknowledge any missile launch, but the KCNA statement suggests North Korea fired a rocket or a missile to take space-based photos. U.S., South Korean and Japanese officials said Sunday they detected a new ballistic missile launch by North Korea, the eighth of its kind this year.</p> <p>Lee Choon Geun, an honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute, said the photos were likely taken when the missile was soaring or reached its apogee. But Lee said he couldn't verify the quality of the North Korean cameras because it didn't release higher-resolution satellite images.</p>

After repeated failures, North Korea successfully put its first satellite into orbit in 2012 and second one in 2016. North Korea says both are Earth observation satellites launched under its peaceful space development program.

Lee said North Korea developed both satellites to spy on its rivals. He said the second satellite is said to be still in orbit but there is no evidence that it has relayed any imagery back to North Korea.

Experts say the North's past satellite launches have still improved its missile programs. In 2017, North Korea performed three intercontinental ballistic missile tests that demonstrated its potential ability to attack the U.S. mainland with nuclear weapons.

A spy satellite is among an array of sophisticated weapons systems that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed last year to develop under five-year military build-up plans. It remains unclear whether North Korea has developed or secured sufficient levels of cameras to be put on a satellite and enable it to monitor South Korean and U.S. military activities.

Cheong Seong-Chang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea said that North Korea is expected to launch a rocket carrying a spy satellite ahead of a major political anniversary in April, the birthday of state founder Kim Il Sung, the late grandfather of Kim Jong Un.

He suggested that Washington's strained ties with Moscow and Beijing — both veto-wielding powers at the U.N. Security Council — would make it difficult for the U.N. to slap additional sanctions on North Korea over the satellite launch. He said tensions would still deepen as the United States would strengthen military drills with South Korea, which North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal, in response.

In January, North Korea test-launched a variety of missiles including one capable of reaching the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam and hinted at restarting suspended long-range and nuclear tests. The North Korean moves were seen as a bid to perfect its weapons technology while pressuring the Biden administration to offer concessions like sanctions relief and increasing its leverage in future negotiations with Washington.

Some experts say North Korea may also view the U.S. preoccupation with Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a chance to accelerate testing activity without receiving any serious response from Washington.

According to the Japanese assessment, the North Korean missile fired Sunday flew about 300 kilometers (190 miles) at a maximum altitude of about 600 kilometers (370 miles) before landing off North Korea's eastern coast.

Lee said the North needs a much more powerful rocket to put a functioning spy satellite into orbit.

After Sunday's launch, Sung Kim, the U.S. special representative for North Korea, held calls with senior South Korean and Japanese diplomats. He underscored the U.S. readiness to engage in serious diplomacy with North Korea while reaffirming "ironclad U.S. commitment to the defense of" South Korea and Japan, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

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HEADLINE	02/27 Sanctions threaten ruble; collapse fear
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/russians-rush-for-dollars-as-sanctions-threaten-ruble-collapse/
GIST	<p><i>Bloomberg News</i> - Russians lined up at cash machines around the country to withdraw foreign currency as new sanctions to punish the Kremlin for its invasion of Ukraine sparked fear the ruble could collapse.</p> <p>The rush for foreign currency came despite some lenders selling dollars at more than a third higher than the market's close on Friday, and well past the psychologically important level of 100 rubles per dollar that many economists said would trigger an interest rate hike by the Bank of Russia. The shock came as</p>

Russians were still digesting news that Europe was closing its airspace to them and popular payment systems like ApplePay would stop working.

“I’ve stood in lines for an hour, but foreign currency is gone everywhere, just rubles,” said Vladimir, a 28-year-old programmer who declined to give his last name, while waiting in a long line at an ATM in a Moscow shopping mall. “I got a late start because I didn’t think this was possible. I’m in shock.”

The U.S. and the European Union this weekend agreed to kick some Russian banks off the SWIFT financial messaging system and freeze the central bank’s reserves as they reacted with horror to the violence of Vladimir Putin’s attack on Ukraine. Most of Europe has closed its airspace to Russian carriers, which could make it difficult to physically transport cash into the country.

Putin is facing the harshest sanctions leveled at a major economy in at least a generation, and some of the pain may be seen when markets open Monday. As recently as Friday, some Biden administration officials privately said that they weren’t seriously considering acting against SWIFT, but momentum built to act as details of the scale of the invasion became clear.

There are indications that the ruble could fall sharply when trading opens on Monday. Exchange rates being offered by lenders are already varying widely on Sunday, from 98.08 rubles per dollar at Alfa Bank to 99.49 at Sberbank PJSC, 105 at VTB Group and 115 at Otkritie Bank at 3:30 p.m. in Moscow. The spot ruble price on the Moscow Exchange closed at 83 per dollar on Friday.

“I can’t see a scenario where it doesn’t get hammered,” said Paul McNamara, a fund manager at GAM Investments. “I don’t expect effective intervention in terms of pricing, but in terms of reducing legal grounds to sell rubles.”

The central bank said last week it was increasing supplies of cash to ATMs to meet the demand and issued another statement Sunday vowing to provide banks “uninterrupted” supplies of rubles. The release made no mention of possible foreign-currency support or the sanctions.

Russia last faced a major run on cash in 2014, when plunging oil prices in the wake of western sanctions triggered a crash in the exchange rate. Sberbank, Russia’s biggest bank, ran through 1.3 trillion rubles (\$16 billion) in a single week.

Representatives of Sberbank and VTB, state lenders that have both been targeted by sanctions, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A spokesperson for the Moscow Exchange declined to comment about plans for ruble trading on Monday.

“The situation is completely unstable, and sanctions and restrictions on the central bank can only get worse,” said Alexandra Suslina, a budget specialist at the Moscow-based Economic Expert Group. “There’s already a bit of a rush to take money out of ATMs, but no cash machine is designed for the lines that will appear at sanctioned banks.”

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HEADLINE	02/27 Putin fears: fast self-fulfilling prophecy?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/putins-fears-of-a-unified-stronger-europe-are-fast-becoming-a-self-fulfilling-prophecy/
GIST	<p><i>Los Angeles Times</i> - WASHINGTON — Russian President Vladimir Putin’s brazen and unprovoked assault on Ukraine is fast turning his fears of a more resolute Europe, and potentially expanded NATO alliance, into a self-fulfilling prophecy.</p> <p>NATO has come together behind stiff economic sanctions against Moscow. Finland and Sweden, after decades of neutrality, have signaled a new interest in joining the alliance while more autocratic members of the defense pact have excoriated Moscow.</p>

And in an effort to shore up Ukraine's defenses, the European Union for the first time will finance the purchase and delivery of weapons, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Sunday. In short order, Europe's leading powers have shifted into a position of heightened defensiveness toward Russia.

"We have to realize that we are now faced with a new normal for our security," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Sunday in an interview on CNN, noting the beefed-up NATO troops' presence in its eastern countries and weapons deliveries to Ukraine. "This is just the beginning of the adaptation that we need to do as a response to a much more aggressive Russia."

On Sunday in Berlin, Germany's new Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivered a rousing speech to parliament declaring that the country would spend more than 2% of its GDP on defense — Putin having accomplished what former President Donald Trump sought for four years, and President Barack Obama before him. Scholz also announced a special 100 billion euro fund to upgrade the country's army, a fundamental shift by Europe's most powerful nation after a long stretch of limited military spending in the decade following the European debt crisis.

Describing Russia's war on Ukraine as "a turning point in the history of our continent," Scholz told lawmakers, "it is clear that we need to invest significantly more in the security of our country."

Constanze Stelzenmüller, a Germany expert at Washington's Brookings Institution, called the speech "Germany's Nixon to China moment," a reference to then President Richard Nixon's pivot from anti-communist hawk to taking his historic trip to China.

Similarly, Scholz's speech was all the more significant coming from a Social Democrat, one known for fiscal austerity who came of age at the end of the Cold War, a time when many believed democracies were ascendant and would remain so.

"Many Germans mistook the fall of the Berlin Wall as a validation of their method, and they have hung on to that belief well beyond the point that it started being proven out of date otherwise by events," Stelzenmüller said. "This is the end of that illusion, and the beginning of a new era in German foreign policy, and that is really a historic moment."

Since taking office in December, Scholz, who served as finance minister to former Chancellor Angela Merkel, had seemed reluctant to take a firm stance toward Putin, given how reliant Germany's economy is on Russia. But war breaking out in Europe has in short order altered security calculations and stiffened its leaders' spines.

Scholz's speech came as the EU also announced it would bar Russian planes from EU airspace and expel Russian state-owned media outlets Russia Today and Sputnik from all 27 members of the European bloc.

"Just like President Putin has unified Ukraine against him and against Russia, President Putin has also unified the NATO alliance," former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor, who also served at NATO, told SiriusXM radio.

Part of what has helped toughen resolve among European leaders like Scholz, as well as France's Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, was their realization of how blatantly Putin lied about his intentions in Ukraine. He claimed to their faces until the last minute — and even now as his troops have mounted an amphibious assault and are sweeping into the north of Ukraine — that he has no intention of invading the smaller neighbor.

"They were doing direct head of state diplomacy, and Putin lied to them," said Ian Bremmer, president of the Eurasia Group, a risk assessment firm in New York.

“Putin has behaved in a staggering, outrageous fashion to rip up what the Europeans thought were kind of inviolable norms,” he said. The shift among European leaders “shows that this is not about Ukraine, it’s a change in the global order that we have slipped into a new Cold War with Russia.”

Scholz announced last week that Germany was halting certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, a priority for Putin, who’d sought greater control of Europe’s energy resources. Saturday Berlin announced it would be sending weapons to support Ukraine, another shift in posture after Scholz’s initial offering months ago of sending 5,000 helmets had been widely derided. At the same time, Europe, along with Canada and the U.S., announced an agreement to sanction Russia’s central bank and to bar select Russian banks from the SWIFT international communications network used by banks around the world, a move that came about only after Germany overcame its reluctance.

Putin’s invasion of Ukraine is at heart an attempt to revisit the end of the Cold War, to redress the westward drift of former Soviet republics and to regain additional territory that’s been independent from Russia for 30 years. Although the conflict is just days old, the reality of Russian tanks and missiles in Ukraine has shocked Europe’s leaders into action, as has Putin’s sinister language stating that he is “denazifying” Kyiv by attempting to oust its president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is Jewish.

“In his mind, he is re-fighting World War II, which suggests that everything is possible,” Stelzenmüller said. “I think that may have played a role in focusing policymakers’ minds in Berlin. To hear a Russian leader talk about a peaceful sovereign country in that way was truly galvanizing.”

Swiss President Ignazio Cassis said on Sunday that it was “very probable” that neutral Switzerland would follow the European Union on Monday in sanctioning Russia and freezing Russian assets in the Alpine country.

The leaders of Finland, which has an 830-mile land border with Russia, and Sweden indicated when the fighting began in Ukraine that they were newly inclined to consider applying for membership in NATO, the 30-nation security alliance that, under Article V of its charter, treats an attack on any member nation as an attack on all.

Moreover, their leaders have since brushed off the Russian foreign ministry’s warning that their NATO membership would trigger “serious military-political consequences.” Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said Saturday that “we’ve heard this before.” And Sweden’s prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, said Friday that Sweden “itself, and independently, decides on our security policy line.”

Along with nearly every other European nation, Sweden has also committed in recent days to sending weapons and defense materiel to Ukraine.

Even NATO member states that are hardly democratic nations, like Turkey and Hungary, have joined in the strong condemnation of Russia and efforts to fortify Ukraine’s defense. On Sunday, Turkey’s foreign minister officially recognized Russia’s attacks on Ukraine as a “state of war” and said Ankara was implementing an international treaty allowing it to limit warships’ passage through the strategic Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits.

President Joe Biden, remarking on revived support for NATO in an interview Friday, marveled at how Putin was “producing the exact opposite effect that he intended.”

Biden has worked hard to keep democratic powers together in their response to Putin. Aware that Europe is under graver danger from Russia given its geographic proximity, and its greater economic reliance on Moscow, he has waited for consensus before pushing specific sanctions measures and deferred to European leaders to announce the elements of the West’s response.

That approach stands in stark contrast to his predecessor, who cozied up to Putin and bullied European leaders, even threatening to withdraw the U.S. from NATO altogether in 2018 when he felt member countries weren’t taking seriously his demand that they contribute more to their defense. Trump went as

	<p>far as to order home some 12,000 troops stationed in Germany, a move many national security officials saw as punitive. Biden scuttled the plan just weeks after taking office last year.</p> <p>While Putin’s actions are strengthening unity across NATO and the European Union, these can still be precarious alliances with chances for a breakdown or new internal conflict. Daniel Serwer, a scholar at Johns Hopkins’ School of Advanced International Studies who specializes in conflict, said the longer term resolution will likely continue with a Europe riven by what he called a “plywood curtain” — not as strong as the Iron Curtain but with a clear pro-West and pro-Russia divide.</p> <p>“Europe ‘whole and free’ will remain a Western mantra,” he said. “It will not, however, be a serious proposition so long as Putin or someone of his ilk governs in Moscow.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Russians hold anti-war rallies
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/russians-hold-anti-war-rallies-amid-ominous-threats-by-putin/
GIST	<p><i>The Associated Press</i> - MOSCOW (AP) — From Moscow to Siberia, Russian anti-war activists took to the streets again Sunday to protest Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, despite the arrests of hundreds of protesters each day by police.</p> <p>Demonstrators held pickets and marched in city centers, chanting “No to war!” as President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian nuclear deterrent to be put on high alert, upping the ante in the Kremlin’s standoff with the West and stoking fears of a nuclear war.</p> <p>“I have two sons and I don’t want to give them to that bloody monster. War is a tragedy for all of us,” 48-year-old Dmitry Maltsev, who joined the rally in St. Petersburg, told <i>The Associated Press</i>.</p> <p>Protests against the invasion started Thursday in Russia and have continued daily ever since, even as Russian police have moved swiftly to crack down on the rallies and detain protesters. The Kremlin has sought to downplay the protests, insisting that a much broader share of Russians support the assault on Ukraine.</p> <p>But in addition to street protests, tens of thousands of people in recent days have endorsed open letters and signed petitions condemning the invasion. Celebrities and famous TV personalities spoke out against it, too. One online petition, launched hours after Putin announced the attack, has gathered over 930,000 signatures in four days, becoming one of the most widely supported petitions in Russia in recent years.</p> <p>In St. Petersburg, where several hundred gathered in the city center, police in full riot gear were grabbing one protester after another and dragging some into police vans, even though the demonstration was peaceful. Footage from Moscow showed police throwing several female protesters on the ground before dragging them away.</p> <p>According to the OVD-Info rights group that tracks political arrests, police detained at least 2,710 Russians in 51 cities for anti-war demonstrations Sunday, bringing the total of those detained over four days to nearly 6,000.</p> <p>Four days into the fighting that has killed scores, Putin raised the stakes dramatically on Sunday, ordering the military Russia’s nuclear forces on high alert, citing Western countries “taking unfriendly actions against our country in the economic sphere” and “top officials from leading NATO members made aggressive statements regarding our country.”</p> <p>The day before, the U.S. and its European allies have warned that the coming round of sanctions could include freezing hard currency reserves of Russia’s Central Bank and cutting Russia off SWIFT international payment system. The unprecedented move could quickly plunge the Russian economy into chaos.</p>

Ordinary Russians fear that stiff sanctions will deliver a crippling blow to the country's economy. Since Thursday, Russians have been flocking to banks and ATMs to withdraw cash, creating long lines and reporting on social media about ATM machines running out of bills.

According to Russia's Central Bank, on Thursday alone Russians withdrew 111 billion rubles (about \$1.3 billion) in cash.

The anti-war protests on Sunday appeared smaller and more scattered than the ones that took place on the first day of Russia's attack in Ukraine, when thousands of people rallied in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but their true scale was hard to assess and they seemed to pick up speed as the day went on.

"It is a crime both against Ukraine and Russia. I think it is killing both Ukraine and Russia. I am outraged, I haven't slept for three nights, and I think we must now declare very loudly that we don't want to be killed and don't want Ukraine to be killed," said Olga Mikheeva, who protested in the Siberian city of Irkutsk.

In Moscow and St. Petersburg, many people went to makeshift memorials for Boris Nemtsov, a top Russian opposition figure who was shot dead near the Kremlin on Feb. 27, 2015. Some brought flowers to honor Nemtsov's memory, while others also held banners protesting the invasion of Ukraine, only to be detained minutes after taking them out.

Nemtsov, one of Russia's most charismatic opposition figures, was a staunch advocate against the fighting in eastern Ukraine, where Russia-backed separatists have been battling with Ukrainian forces since 2014 in a drawn-out conflict that has killed more than 14,000.

Russian authorities in recent days have moved to stifle critical voices.

Speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament Vyacheslav Volodin said the anti-war stance of "certain cultural figures" was "inappropriate" and "nothing short of a betrayal of your own people."

Access to Twitter and Facebook has been restricted, and human rights advocates feared similar steps would soon be taken against YouTube.

Russia's state communications and media watchdog Roskomnadzor on Sunday demanded that Google to lift restrictions imposed on YouTube channels run by several Russian state media outlets. The Network Freedoms rights group noted that Facebook's refusal to comply with a similar demand this week led to restricted access to the platform.

The website of the Current Time, a Russian TV channel launched by the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that has been critical of the Kremlin, became unavailable Sunday after the channel reported receiving a notification from Roskomnadzor about blocking it.

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HEADLINE	02/27 Germany vast increase defense spending
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/27/europe-germany-defense-russia-ukraine/
GIST	<p>German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Sunday announced a major increase in the country's defense spending, marking one of the most significant changes in decades to the country's post-World War II approach to security and possibly upending European defense policy.</p> <p>German lawmakers were still debating the plans as over 100,000 protesters assembled just a few meters away in front of the Brandenburg Gate to rally for peace. The scale of the protest – one of the largest in years – took authorities by surprise, and provided a visible display of just how deeply Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shaken Germans this week.</p>

Germany, Europe's biggest economy and the most populous nation in the E.U., had long frustrated the United States and allies across the continent with its hesitation to invest more in its military. Its stance obstructed numerous attempts to formulate a more ambitious European security strategy, including repeated efforts from French President Emmanuel Macron to form a European army.

The dramatic escalation in Europe's response has been cheered by European foreign policy hawks who had long advocated that the continent get serious in its response to the Russian threat. But reactions have been tinged by deep regret that the toughened stance didn't come sooner.

"What has happened in the last few days has been a serious wake up call for Europe, a serious wake up call for the NATO alliance and, tragically and very sadly for Ukraine, a wake up call too late in the day," said Richard Dannatt, a retired general and former British army chief. "We should have seen what Vladimir Putin has been up to."

Speaking in the German parliament on Sunday, Scholz called Russia's attack on Ukraine "a turning point in the history of our continent" and announced a set of new measures. The German military will receive a one-off additional payment of over \$110 billion, he said – about twice the amount of Germany's defense budget last year.

"Better and more modern equipment, more staff, that costs a lot of money," Scholz told lawmakers in a special session.

Scholz's plans are unlikely to have an immediate impact on the current crisis in Ukraine. Germany won't be sending troops to the country, and neither will any other members of the NATO alliance, which have been wary of being drawn into a direct confrontation with nuclear weapons-armed Russia. But the German plans could have profound ripple effects within the European Union and NATO, which Ukraine is not a member of.

NATO's stance on Ukraine has long, in essence, been that membership has its privileges: While the alliance may be willing to offer support – both lethal and nonlethal – it won't get directly involved in sending troops to defend Ukraine from outside attack, as it would with any NATO member.

Russia's invasion hasn't changed that calculus – much to the frustration of Ukrainians who have been seeking NATO membership for years, including Zelensky.

"We were left by ourselves. Who is ready to go to war for us? Honestly, I don't see anybody. Who is ready to give Ukraine guarantees of NATO membership?" asked Zelensky in a speech after Russia invaded.

Scholz committed to exceeding the NATO defense spending target of 2 percent of GDP "from now on, every year." Last year Germany spent an estimated 1.53 percent of its annual economic output on defense, well below the 2 percent NATO target.

"We are not only striving for this goal because we have promised our friends and allies that we will increase our defense spending to 2 percent of our economic output by 2024, but we do this for ourselves, too, for our own safety," Scholz said.

The plans will still need to be approved by lawmakers, but there appeared to be widespread support for them on Sunday.

"There has been an awakening, not just by the political class, but also by ordinary voters," said Marcel Dirsus, a German political scientist and fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University.

During prior crises, including after the 2014 annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, Germany had hesitated to swing more directly into confrontation with a country that helped defeat the Nazis. Germany's

deep economic relationship with Russia is decades old and, many critics say, has led to a foreign policy orthodoxy that long held back Europe from sharper criticism of the Kremlin.

The German army's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Alfons Mais, said last week that "the army that I am allowed to lead, is more or less powerless" against Russia amid the current crisis. Defense associations have warned the German military is underfunded and lacks crucial equipment.

Germany's lagging defense spending had long been defended across the German political spectrum, even as its international allies voiced discontent. Scholz's Social Democratic Party was among core opponents of a major increase in spending.

The first signs of a substantial break in tradition came on Saturday, when Germany announced that it would deliver extensive weaponry to Ukraine and embraced broad restrictions on Russian banks that it had previously rebuffed. Scholz said he would rush 1,000 antitank weapons and 500 Stinger missiles to Ukraine.

"This is the last door being closed on the Kremlin," said retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, who served as commander of the U.S. Army Europe during the Obama and Trump administrations.

"It is going to be a sea change because all of Europe is looking at this in a different way," he said. "The E.U. has discovered its heart and spine."

Hodges suggested that Europe's attitude changed because of Putin's "flat-out lying" about the invasion. Senior officials who "really wanted to believe that you could negotiate with them" have been "humiliated," he said, "and they are very angry about it."

The move also opened up Europe's weapons-packed armories to Ukraine, since Berlin retained a veto power over how German-manufactured armaments were used even after they were sold elsewhere.

Berlin greenlighted a shipment of 400 Dutch-owned (but German made) rocket-propelled grenade launchers and several Estonian-owned howitzers to Ukraine, three European officials said. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss nonpublic arms transfer agreements that were still receiving their final approvals.

It came just days after Scholz froze the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project bringing Russian gas to Western Europe – another decision that weeks ago seemed inconceivable.

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HEADLINE	02/27 AAA: risky drivers drove more in pandemic
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/risky-drivers-drove-pandemic-aaa/story?id=83068963
GIST	<p>Traffic deaths surged during the pandemic, despite less cars on the road. A new study from AAA found an increase in reckless drivers on the roads may be to blame.</p> <p>The study, conducted in fall of 2020, found an estimated 4% of drivers in the United States reported they increased their driving during the pandemic. Those drivers tended to be younger and mostly male, AAA said.</p> <p>That group also reported to engage in risky driving behaviors such as distracted driving, speeding, aggressive driving, substance-impaired driving and not using seatbelts, the report found.</p> <p>"Our research finds that higher-risk motorists accounted for a greater share of drivers during the pandemic than before it," Dr. David Yang, executive director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, said in a release. "Safety-minded individuals drove less, while many who increased their driving tended to engage in riskier behaviors behind the wheel."</p>

	<p>The average daily number of driving trips made by adults in the U.S. decreased by 42% during the early months of the pandemic, AAA said.</p> <p>Despite the decrease in traffic, approximately 13% more people died on U.S. roads in the second half of 2020 compared to the same time the year prior, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).</p> <p>The agency estimates 38,680 people died on roads in 2020 -- the largest projected number of fatalities since 2007.</p> <p>AAA's survey results were part of the organization's annual Traffic Safety Culture index. Researchers questioned almost 3,000 drivers between October and November of 2020 about their driving habits in the past 30 days.</p> <p>"About 4% of the population reported they were actually driving more because of the pandemic, and the emphasis of our study here is that group, although small, is driving more and that they appeared to be far higher risk drivers, both in terms of their characteristics and in terms of their own self-reported behaviors behind the wheel," Brian Tefft, senior researcher at the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, said in an interview with ABC News.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Ukraine, Russia reps to meet in Belarus
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/27/ukraine-Ukraine-Russia-Belarus/4711645972242/
GIST	<p>Feb. 27 (UPI) -- A Ukrainian delegation will meet with Russian officials for talks along the Ukrainian-Belarusian border, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's office announced Sunday.</p> <p>"The politicians have agreed that the Ukrainian delegation will meet with the Russian delegation without preconditions on the Ukrainian-Belarusian border, near the Pripyat River," Zelensky's office said, according to CNN.</p> <p>It's unclear exactly when the talks will take place.</p> <p>The announcement came after Zelensky initially declined Russia's proposal to meet in Belarus. He said Belarus, which supports Russia's invasion of Ukraine, is not neutral ground.</p> <p>"Of course we want peace and want to meet. We want to end the war. Warsaw, [Poland], Bratislava, [Slovakia], Istanbul, [Turkey], and Baku, [Azerbaijan], were offered to Russia. Any other cities are fine with us as long as there are no missiles flying from this country," Zelensky said.</p> <p>But the later announcement by Zelensky's office took into account assurances by Belarusian President Aleksander Lukashenko.</p> <p>"Lukaschenko has taken responsibility for ensuring that all planes, helicopters and missiles stationed on the Belarusian territory will remain on the ground during the Ukrainian delegation's travel, meeting and return," Zelensky's office said.</p> <p>Al Jazeera reported, though, there appears to be confusion about where, exactly, the talks will take place.</p> <p>While Ukraine agreed to meet on the border, Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters Sunday that Ukrainian officials suggested the city of Gomel, about 20 miles north of the Ukrainian border, as the location for talks.</p> <p>Russia's state-run Tass news agency reported the Russian delegation already arrived in Belarus for the talks. The delegation consists of officials from the Foreign Ministry, Defense Ministry and other federal agencies. The negotiators are headed by Russian presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky.</p>

	<p>The possible negotiations come four days after Russia invaded Ukraine amid months of growing tension between the former Soviet republics. Putin has falsely said Ukraine was stolen from Russia after former Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin mistakenly recognized a distinct Ukraine.</p> <p>Putin has taken issue with Ukraine's desire to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which would expand the alliance's territory and bring it closer to Russia's border.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Global Covid cases drop 15%, deaths 16%
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/27/world-covid-19-cases-drop15-records-south-korea-new-zealand/3661645970590/
GIST	<p>Feb. 27 (UPI) -- COVID-19 is continuing to subside worldwide with a weekly 16% decrease in deaths and 15% in cases three months after the Omicron variant was first reported. But Asia's infections rose 4% and deaths were only down 0.9% with South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam and New Zealand experiencing infection surges.</p> <p>The variant also has spread to New Zealand, hitting five digits in cases for the first time with the high before Omicron 216 on Nov. 24</p> <p>In the past seven days, global cases increased 10,926,144 for a total of 435,315,212, according to tracking by Worldometers.info so far Sunday. Deaths, which lag a few weeks behind infections, increased to 58,841, for a total of 5,965,853. One week ago, the cases declined 21% and deaths fell 10%.</p> <p>Daily cases Saturday dropped to 1,308,059 compared with record of 3,804,960 Jan. 20. On Dec. 13, it was down to 486,455. During the height of the Delta variant spike, cases reached 903,836 on April 29. The 6,548 deaths reported Saturday is less than half of the record 17,494 Jan. 27, 2020.</p> <p>Since Omicron was first detected in South Africa on Nov. 24, most nations had set daily cases records.</p> <p>But only three big countries set records last week: South Korea (171,448 Wednesday with 163,558 Sunday), Vietnam (77,982 Saturday) and New Zealand (15,016 Sunday).</p> <p>South Korea reported only 49 deaths Sunday, below the record of 109 Dec. 23 with Vietnam 88 on Saturday, far below 805 Sept. 1. New Zealand added no deaths Sunday.</p> <p>Other nations with recent daily cases records include United States 904,168, France 501,635, Italy 228,1279, Brazil 286,050, Germany 247,128, Britain 218,724, Russia 203,766, Netherlands 189,377, Spain at 161,688, Australia 153,968, Argentina 134,439, Turkey 111,157, Japan 100,949, Israel 83,739, Indonesia 63,956, Mexico 60,552, Canada 55,350, Greece 50,126.</p> <p>South Korea, with a population of 15.8 million, reported 973,274 cases in the week and rose to 2,994,841, a 73% gain, with cases under 4,000 daily before the Omicron detection. South Korea has reported 7,944 deaths, including a record 112 Saturday then 49 Sunday.</p> <p>Korea is focusing on detecting virus in high-risk groups -- those 60 and older and people with pre-existing medical conditions. Starting Tuesday, those who live with people who have tested positive will no longer be required to quarantine, regardless of vaccination status.</p> <p>Despite this policy, 643 patients were hospitalized in severe or critical condition on Saturday compared with 408 patients a week earlier.</p> <p>Lee Ki-il, a senior health official during a briefing Friday, said the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency was prepared to take in and treat up to 2,000 patients with severe cases.</p> <p>Korea has vaccinated 86.6% of its population with at least one dose.</p>

Indonesia, with 278 million people, had been relatively immune from the spike. One week ago they rose 74% but most recently dropped 8% to 355,397 for a total of 5,197,505 in 17th. Indonesia's previous record was 56,715 in mid-July last year during the Delta surge.

But Indonesia's weekly deaths rose 1,642 at 44% rise for a total of 148,073 in ninth place, including 229 Sunday after 317 Thursday, the most since mid-September.

Indonesia has vaccinated 70.1% of its population, mainly with Sinovac produced by China, which are an inactivated virus as opposed to messenger RNA using genetic material to trigger the infection-fighting process in the body,

Sinovac was shown to be 50.4% effective in a Brazilian trial compared with Pfizer and Moderna about 95%.

Vietnam's cases rose 78% with the total 2,787,493 for a total of 3,219,177. Deaths were up 12% and a total of 40,050.

Vietnam's vaccination rate is 81.6%.

In all, more than 10.7 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered worldwide, an increase of 200 million in one week with the world's population of 7.9 billion, according to Bloomberg tracking.

Broken down by world regions, the United States and Canada have administered at least one dose to 77% of the population, followed by Latin America at 76%, Asia-Pacific 75%, Europe at 68%, Middle East 53% and Africa at 17%, according to The New York Times tracking.

Following is the rank order of some nations' vaccination rates elsewhere in Asia: Mainland China 89.7%, Singapore 87.5%, India 70.0%, Malaysia 81.7%, Japan 80.8%, Turkey 69.0%, Iran 74.5%, Israel 72.7%, and Philippines 57.6%.

In Asia over the past week, there were 3,959,541 for a total of 115,911,462 and deaths were 13,446 for a cumulative 1,346,107.

India holds the world daily record for deaths, not including major reconciliations: 6,148 last June. The Delta variant emerged in India.

India's cases declined 51% with 10,273 Sunday, the fewest since late December, to 42,916,117 in second place behind the United States. Since the Omicron strain, the most cases have been 347,254 in January. The record during the Delta surge was 412,618 on May 5, 2021.

Fatalities dropped 44%, with 243 Sunday, three weeks after rising 68% The total is 513,724 in third behind the United States and Brazil.

Starting Saturday, the Delhi government lifted all restrictions, including no masks required while traveling in a vehicle. But mask mandates continue elsewhere.

In Mainland China, where COVID-19 originated more than two years ago, the nation of 1.5 billion people, the largest in the world, no deaths have been reported in a year.

The bulk of China's fatalities were announced only a few months after the first confirmed one on Jan. 9, 2020. The last reported fatality was Jan. 28, 2021, and the figure now is 4,636 in 85th behind Australia with 5,159. Cases reported Sunday: 239.

China has adopted a zero-tolerance stance on coronavirus, locking down cities of several million people and massive testing. And this was applied to the Summer Olympics in a "closed loop" with 60,000

competitors, journalists and other officials cut off from others and being tested for COVID-19 every day. The games ended last Sunday.

Japan, which hosted the Summer Olympics during the Delta surge, reported 63,703 cases, 21 days after a record 100,959 with a 16% weekly drop. The total is 4,498,175. Until the surge, the record was 26,184 less than two weeks after the Olympics ended.

Japan also added 143 deaths Sunday for a total of 23,485, rising 1,578 in a week for a 15% gain. The record was set Wednesday with 322.

Japan has a relatively low 38,823 infections per million and deaths at 185 per million.

Iran is 12th in deaths at 136,631 including 241 Sunday.

Turkey is eighth in cases, adding 61,764 Saturday, for a total of 13,975,389, and 19th in deaths at 94,026 including 221 new ones.

Israel has a death toll of 10,118 with four reported Sunday and 6,254 cases for a total of 3,613,765.

Starting Tuesday, all tourists will be allowed entry into the country, regardless of vaccination status, and the Green Pass system, requiring present proof of vaccination for most venues, also will end.

Guam, a territory of the United States with only 169,000 people, reported 1,089.1 cases per 100,000 in the past week, only second behind the Northern Mariana Islands at 2,144.6 and Palau at 1,221.4, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Maine is the top state 1,017.1. Guam has 44,238 cases and 322 deaths.

Guam has vaccinated 95% of its adults with at least one vaccine dose.

Most nations in Europe are heavily vaccinated. In the European Union, it's 75.5%, including 87.2% in Spain, 84.9% in France, 84.8% in Italy, 83.2% in Denmark, 77.3% in Netherlands, 76.3% in Germany, 76.2% in Austria. Britain, which has left the EU, has a 78.3% rate.

Russia is lagging the world in vaccination with 53.6% of its population with at least one dose of a domestic-produced vaccine, including Sputnik 5.

Two other Eastern European nations have low vaccination rates: Ukraine at 37.9% and Romania at 42.1%. Poland's rate is 59.3% and Czech Republic's is 64.9%.

In Europe, cases declined 22% with a world-high 5,086,546 for 155,392,410 in first place among continents. Deaths dropped 15% to a total of 1,705,262, also in first place.

In Germany, cases surged early during the Omicron variant. They declined 7% last week, 1,135,211 No. 1 in the world ahead of Russia with 975,303, and have risen to seventh in the world at 14,649,897. On Sunday so far, 16,386 infections were reported.

Until Nov. 4, the record at the time was 32,546 on April 14.

Deaths rose 13% in one week in Germany. On Dec. 24, Germany reported 575 deaths, the most since 589 on Feb. 16. Sunday's gain was 14 for 123,297 in 14th. Deaths are nowhere near the record of 1,249 on Dec. 29.

Germany has a nationwide lockdown for the unvaccinated, including nonessential services, and social distancing rules. But Germany plans to hold a "freedom day" on March 20.

On Sunday, Russia reported 769 deaths, with the record 1,254 on Nov. 19, for a total of 350,927 in fourth place. Russia's cases are down 23% but deaths are up 4%.

France reported the ninth-most cases in the world in the past week, 418,906, behind Germany, Russia, South Korea, Brazil, Japan with the United States seventh but decreased 31%. France's 22,646,731 total cases are fourth in the world, including 53,623 Saturday.

France is 11th in deaths at 138,059, including 101 Sunday.

France has the worst infection rate among large nations: 345,687 per million with the world at 55,847. Britain is at 274,621 and United States at 241,047. Denmark's rate is 449,376 and Israel's is 387,494.

But starting Monday, people no longer will be required to wear masks indoors, including public areas, but they will be required on public transportation.

In deaths elsewhere, Italy is eighth with 152,989, including 210 Saturday. In the top 20: Poland 15th with 111,316 rising by 40 Sunday; Ukraine 16th with 10,505, with no data amid an invasion by Russia; and Spain 17th with 999,410 and no data on weekends.

Italy reported 38,375 infections on Saturday. Until the recent spike, the record was 41,198 in November 2020.

In March, Italy is planning a "return to normality" in scrapping its restrictions.

"Our aim is to reopen everything, as soon as possible", Italian premier Mario Draghi pledged, announcing that the country's state of emergency would not be extended once it expires on March 31.

Italy plans to phase out the "Green Pass," which is proof of vaccination, tested negative or previously had the disease, on public transportation and in many public spaces. And vaccines are now required for those older than 50 in the workplace. The outdoor mask mandate was recently eliminated.

In England, Plan B restrictions ended, including working from home if possible, no mandatory masks in public or a vaccine pass to enter venues.

And starting last Thursday, people won't be legally required to self-isolate after testing positive for the virus. And free tests will end in England on April 1. Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced these changes on Monday as part of the "living with Covid" strategy.

Britain's deaths are 161,224 in seventh, including 120 Friday -- the most recent data -- with a 28% weekly drop. The record is 1,824 in January one year ago.

Britain's cases decreased 28% with 31,933 Friday for a total of 18,804,765 in fifth.

In North America, the deaths are 1,400,893 with an 18% weekly decrease, and cases are 94,795,709 declining 41%.

The United States' cases dropped 45% and deaths went down 19%. On Saturday, the United States reported 635 deaths and 126,003 cases though two-thirds didn't report data. Totals are 972,930 fatalities and 80,560,293 infections.

Mexico is fifth in the world in deaths at 318,014 with a weekly decrease of 11% and 331 recorded Saturday and the record 1,4127 in late January a year ago. The nation's cases decreased 22% with 13,459 most recently for 17th at 5,502,586.

Canada's cases dropped 14% in one week with 3,601 on Saturday for 7th with 3,280,695.

Until the Omicron variant, the record was 11,383 one year ago Jan. 3.

Canada's deaths are down 12% and the nation ranks 26th worldwide with 36,522 including 48 on Saturday with the record 257 on Dec. 29, 2020.

Canada has around one-third the rates per million than the United States with deaths 941 and cases 84,594.

Canada has the best one-shot vaccination rate of the three largest countries in North America at 85.1%. The United States is at 75.6% for one shot. Mexico's percentage is 66.6%, though it was the first Latin American nation to begin vaccinating people.

In Canada, several provinces plan to put an end to restrictions, including masks no longer mandatory in many parts of the nation, But those measures could return if needed.

"We need to be ready for the fall, in case we need to up our game again," chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam said Friday.

In Mexico, there are no "red" maximum risk states or "orange" second highest in the traffic light system. Cancun, a popular tourist designation, is "yellow" as part of Quintana Roo's state with adjacent Yucatan also that color. All states bordering the United States are yellow except Baja California "green."

In South America, cases decreased 25% in one week with a total of 54,184,955 and deaths were down 17% to 1,256,749

Brazil reported 722 deaths Saturday with the record 4,211 in early April for a total of 648,989 in second. Brazil's cases declined 7% with cases down 22%, with 72,856 most recently, for a total of 28,744,050 in third.

Also in the top 10 for deaths, Peru is sixth at 210,407 and Colombia is 10th at 138,598. Argentina is 13th with 126,048 and Chile 23rd with 42,070.

On Sunday, Chile added 151 deaths with 234 Thursday, the most since early last July. On Saturday: Colombia 97, Peru 178 and Argentina 90.

These numbers are way down from records: Peru with 1,154, Colombia with 754, Argentina with 791, Chile with 316.

Peru has the world's highest death rate at 6,238 per million people.

Some South American nations have high vaccination rates. Chile has the best vaccination rate on the continent at 91.1% with Argentina 88.6%, Brazil at 83.2%, Colombia at 81.6% and Peru 79.7%.

Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo Carnival festivities have been postponed to April 21 from Friday.

Like South America, it's summer in Oceania.

Cases increased 9% a total of 3,284,128 and deaths were down 22% for a total of 7,457.

Australia had largely avoided mass infections until the Omicron surge, with only 2,688 on Oct. 14. The nation reported 18,474 more cases Sunday, about 12% of the record recently.

Overall, the nation has climbed to 30th with 3,191,986. Deaths are 5,159, including 27 more Sunday. On Jan. 28, it set a daily record with 134, with the previous mark before Omicron 59 in early September 2020.

Australia has vaccinated 85.8% of its population with at least one dose.

Australia no longer is in lockdown.

On Monday, Australia allowed international tourists for the first time in nearly two years. Australians and some others were allowed to return from late last year.

New Zealand's deaths rose by three in one week after none for two weeks. New Zealand, with only 5 million people, hit five digits in cases for the first time Saturday with 13,625. The previous Sunday it was a record 2,366.

In the nation, about half the recent cases have been among people in their teens and twenties.

"Younger people, much more mobile and tending to go out a lot more and also tending to get symptoms at lower rates and so less likely to be tested, less likely to know they're infected, less likely to be isolating," Auckland University COVID modeler Dr. Dion O'Neale told Newshub.

"New Zealand is currently one of the most permissive countries in terms of what we can do with an Omicron wave.

"The government is putting its head in the sand ... I guess the Government messaging makes people inclined to put their heads in the sand as well."

One teen said: "It probably doesn't surprise me since we're having to be at school at the moment."

New Zealand, which has an 83.7% vaccination rate, is on a traffic light system. The entire country is in Red, meaning everyone will be required to wear masks in public venues and on public transportation. Customers are limited and events have been called off because of participation curbs.

Though the variant emerged in Africa, the continent's situation has stabilized with a 30% weekly cases drop with a total of 11,514,116. Deaths went down 45% for a total toll of 249,086.

South Africa's deaths went down 65% and cases dropped 12%.

Overall, South Africa has reported 3,671,991 cases, in 20th worldwide, with 6,629 Saturday. Eleven weeks ago there was a record 37,875

The nation is 18th in deaths at 99,191, including 46 Saturday.

South Africa's vaccination rate is only 34.1%.

The COVAX Facility delivered the first COVID-19 vaccines to Africa one year ago and it has grown to around 400 million doses have been administered in 50 nations, which have a combined population of 1.2 billion.

"While this is a big step forward, we need a quantum leap," said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization Regional Director for Africa, said in a statement. "Mass vaccination drives are one tactic which is enabling countries to speed up their rollout."

WHO is partnering with UNICEF and Gavi, the vaccine alliance, to push mass vaccination campaigns in 10 priority countries to reach 100 million people by the end of April.

Tunisia has the second-most deaths with 27,702 ahead of Egypt with 23,992.

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HEADLINE	02/27 UN: 368,000 Ukrainians fled country
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/27/ukraine-Ukraine-refugees-Russian-invasion/7311645978568/

GIST	<p>Feb. 27 (UPI) -- At least 368,000 Ukrainians have fled the country in the four days since Russia invaded, the United Nations announced Sunday.</p> <p>That's more than double the figure the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, reported the day before. The UNHCR said it based its numbers on data provided by national authorities.</p> <p>"As it is almost impossible or us to move around safely in many parts, we cannot confirm numbers," said Joung-ah Ghedini-Williams, head of global communications for the UNHCR said.</p> <p>Grandi said most of the Ukrainians fleeing the country are going to country, with others traveling to Moldova, Romania and elsewhere.</p> <p>"The governments and people of those countries are welcoming refugees. It is now urgent to share this responsibility in concrete ways," Grandi tweeted.</p> <p>Poland, which has strong ties to Ukraine and a large Ukrainian population, announced Saturday that it would allow refugees who don't have identification into the country. It also shortened processing times, according to U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power.</p> <p>The European Union said it's received at least 300,000 of the refugees as of Sunday and expects more.</p> <p>"I think we need to prepare for millions," EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson told reporters in Brussels.</p> <p>EU member state representatives met Sunday to discuss the Russian invasion.</p> <p>Chris Melzer, a spokesman for the UNHCR, said there was a backlog of Ukrainians at the borders attempting to leave the country. He said there was a 9-mile line of people waiting at the Polish border.</p> <p>Many of the countries now openly taking in the Ukrainians had previously hardened their borders against a migrant crisis over the last several years, which saw more than 1 million people flee Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Average gas price spikes \$.10 to \$3.64/gal.
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/average-us-gas-price-spikes-10-cents-over-2-weeks-to-364
GIST	<p>CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP) — The average U.S. price of a gallon of regular-grade gasoline spiked 10 cents over the past two weeks to \$3.64 per gallon (3.8 liters).</p> <p>Industry analyst Trilby Lundberg of the Lundberg Survey said Sunday that the price jump came after a rise in crude oil costs amid global supply concerns following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Lundberg said further increases are likely.</p> <p>The price at the pump is about a dollar higher than it was a year ago.</p> <p>Nationwide, the highest average price for regular-grade gas is in the San Francisco Bay Area, at \$4.86 per gallon. The lowest average is in Houston, at \$3.14 per gallon.</p> <p>According to the survey, the average price of diesel is \$4.02 a gallon, up 12 cents over two weeks.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Oregon keeps indoor mask mandate
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/despite-new-cdc-guidance-oregon-plans-to-keep-indoor-mask-mandate-in-place-1

GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released new COVID-19 guidance on Friday, but it's not going to have an immediate impact on Oregon.</p> <p>The director of the CDC, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, says the country is "in a stronger place" and is able to loosen some of the COVID-19 protocols in place. This new framework greatly impacts who needs to mask inside.</p> <p>"This new framework moves beyond just looking at cases and test positivity to evaluate factors that reflects the severity of disease, including hospitalizations and hospital capacity," Walensky said.</p> <p>With that focus in mind, the framework puts U.S. counties in either a high, medium or low risk group. According to the CDC, most of those in the low and medium groups no longer need to mask inside.</p> <p>"We want to give people a break from things like mask wearing when our levels are low, and then have the ability to reach for them again, should things get worse in the future," Walensky said.</p> <p>More than half of Oregon is in the low and medium categories; still, the Oregon Health Authority will not immediately lift the indoor mask mandate in place.</p> <p>In an email from Rudy Owens, a public affairs specialist with OHA, Owens said OHA is sticking with the decision to lift the indoor mask mandate in Oregon mid-March.</p> <p><i>"OHA is reviewing the latest guidance that is being shared today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)," Owens said over email. "We know many people will have questions about what the latest CDC guidance means for Oregon. Based on declining COVID-19 hospitalizations, Oregon will lift indoor masking and school masking requirements on March 19."</i></p> <p>The new CDC guidance includes schools.</p> <p>"Since July 2021, CDC recommended universal masking in schools no matter what level of impact COVID-19 was having on the community," Dr. Greta Massetti, who is with the CDC's COVID-19 Response Incident Management Team, said. "With this update, CDC will now only recommend universal school masking in communities at the high level."</p> <p>Nearly the entire bottom half of the state of Oregon is currently in the high category. The CDC says it plans to update the county levels weekly for the foreseeable future.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Millions free Covid at-home tests unclaimed
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/millions-of-bidens-free-covid-at-home-tests-still-unclaimed
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) - Nearly half of the 500 million free COVID-19 tests the Biden administration recently made available to the public still have not been claimed as virus cases plummet and people feel less urgency to test.</p> <p>Wild demand swings have been a subplot in the pandemic, from vaccines to hand sanitizer, along with tests. On the first day of the White House test giveaway in January, COVIDtests.gov received over 45 million orders. Now officials say fewer than 100,000 orders a day are coming in for the packages of four free rapid tests per household, delivered by the U.S. Postal Service.</p> <p>Still, the White House sees the program as a step toward a deeper, yet more elastic, testing infrastructure that will accommodate demand surges and remain on standby when cases wane. "We totally intend to sustain this market," Dr. Tom Inglesby, testing adviser to the COVID-19 response team, told The Associated Press. "We know the market is volatile and will come up and down with surges in variants."</p> <p>The White House says Americans have placed 68 million orders for packages of tests, which leaves about 46% of the stock of tests still available to be ordered.</p>

Testing will become more important [with mask requirements now easing](#), say some independent experts. "If infection control is still our priority, testing is central," said Dr. Leana Wen, a former Baltimore health commissioner and commentator on the pandemic. "Four tests per household for one family will only last you one time. There should be enough tests for families to test twice a week."

Inglesby maintains that the pieces are falling into place to accommodate that.

Private insurers are now required to cover eight free rapid tests per person, per month. Medicare coverage will start in the spring. The administration has also been making free at-home tests available through libraries, clinics and other community venues. Capacity for the more accurate PCR tests performed by labs has been built up. The White House recently put out a request to industry for ideas on how to sustain and expand domestic testing for the rest of this year.

Wen says people still need a guide for when to test and how often. "Right now it is still unclear," she said.

President Joe Biden's pivot to testing came under duress as the omicron variant gained force just before Christmas. Tests were frustratingly hard to come by, and expensive. The White House is sensitive to criticism that help may have come too late.

"There is no question some people found out they were positive from taking one of these tests and were able to keep other people from getting infected," said Tim Manning, supply coordinator for the COVID-19 response team.

Around mid-December, with omicron projections grimmer by the day, White House officials began discussing how to make free tests available for anyone who wanted one. But if the government started siphoning up tests on the market, that would just make the shortage worse.

"A critical thing to us was that anything we did had to be done in a way did not create a shortage at retail to the general public," Manning said.

The White House enlisted the Pentagon and parts of the Health and Human Services Department that had worked on the Trump administration's vaccine development effort to distribute vaccines. Logistics experts scoured the globe for available tests. The Postal Service was designated to take the orders and deliver them.

That part proved to be a good call, said Hana Schank, an expert on government technology projects with the New America think-tank. The Postal Service already had a database of every address in the land, and the means to deliver.

"At the federal level the only people who have a database connected to a fulfillment engine would be the Post Office," she said.

The project took less than a month to get ready, Manning said. "We said this is not online retail," he said. "This is emergency response, so we have to go as fast as possible."

To make sure it wasn't just the tech savvy who would end up getting free tests, the administration targeted a share of deliveries to people in low-income areas. The White House worked with service organizations to get the word out.

"We prioritized the processing of orders to the highest social vulnerability zip codes in the country," testing adviser Inglesby said.

One of the service groups was the National Association of Community Health Workers, whose members help people navigate the health care system. Executive director Denise Smith said the group was able to use its website to link more than 630,000 people to [COVIDtests.gov](#).

	<p>Overall about 20% to 25% of the tests have gone to people in distressed areas, officials said.</p> <p>Now that demand is way down, it's unclear what will happen to the White House giveaway program. Allowing repeat orders is one possibility.</p> <p>Smith says groups like hers should get any surplus. "We know where the people are," she said.</p> <p>Although the program is still in its infancy, analyst Lindsey Dawson of the Kaiser Family Foundation believes its legacy may lie in familiarizing more people with testing. "It may get someone comfortable with utilizing the tests, thinking about how they might use testing in their lives," she said.</p> <p>Savita Sharaf, a retiree from the Maryland suburbs outside the nation's capital, said she ordered her free tests around the middle of January and got them in early February. She's tried to conserve them, for added peace of mind. In the stores, she couldn't find tests for less than \$25.</p> <p>"I'm so relieved because I can immediately test myself," Sharaf said. "If we had a high vaccination rate, it would be a little easier to say let up on this program. But I feel we have to watch for the next month or two, to see what happens."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Seattle back after 2yrs; dare hope normal?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/after-2-years-of-covid-in-seattle-area-do-we-dare-hope-for-normal/
GIST	<p>Seattle is back, though it's not back to normal.</p> <p>How does one define pre-pandemic normal? Heavy traffic? Loud, crowded restaurants? The day-to-day minutiae of a workplace?</p> <p>Traffic has almost reached its previous aggravating volumes. Restaurants, bars and most everything else is open. Workers at some of the region's largest employers are returning to their cubicles.</p> <p>And yet, daily new coronavirus case counts in Washington remain in the thousands, according to the state Department of Health. About a fifth of the state's hospital beds are occupied by patients who were admitted with COVID. People are still dying from virus complications.</p> <p>The dichotomy of feeling hopeful as restrictions ease, while also grieving from the past 24 months, can be dizzying. More than 11,000 Washington residents have died, countless others are hurting from the loss of loved ones, of connections, of important milestones.</p> <p>Two years ago this week, the first COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. were reported at Life Care Center of Kirkland, marking the Seattle area as the country's initial epicenter.</p> <p>Long gone are the goals of "flattening the curve." There will be no COVID victory march. Instead, experts say, Seattle is approaching a reopened life, with COVID.</p> <p>"The end of the pandemic will not be televised," said Kira Mauseth, co-lead of the state Department of Health's Behavioral Health Strike Team and a Seattle University senior instructor of psychology. "Things are more tempered. People are tired. There will be relief and joy for some people, but it's not the same sense of euphoric excitement it might have been before. It's going to be a collective, long-term recovery process."</p> <p>Pandemic restrictions — hallmarks of the change and turmoil of the past two years — are easing. The Biden administration on Friday said it will relax federal mask guidelines. Beginning Tuesday, King County restaurants, bars and other indoor establishments will no longer have to check someone's vaccination</p>

[status](#). Three weeks later, [Washington's mask requirements will lift for those spots](#), among others. Masks will no longer be required in schools, affecting [more than 1 million students](#) who have existed in a pandemic for at least 10% of their lives.

“Where is the end? I’m not sure,” Gov. Jay Inslee said Feb. 17, as he announced the easing of mask mandates. “No human being can tell you where the end of COVID is. It appears it will be with us for some period of time, and we will have to figure out how to live with this existing virus.”

For Washingtonians, today’s pandemic looks different from a year ago, different from two years ago. At Harborview Medical Center, Dr. Chloe Bryson-Cahn is exhausted. Entering year three, the elation of pride over the pandemic response is gone. The daily pots-and-pans banging for health care workers ended long ago.

“I think last year we were still riding the high of ‘look what we have done, our hospitals have responded so well, our community has responded,’” said Bryson-Cahn, the Seattle hospital’s associate medical director for infection control. “That exhilaration is gone. I think it’s all too much. All of it has been so, so much. Asking people to respond for a year is one thing. Asking for two years, especially as it continues to outsmart us, is really difficult.”

She’s optimistic about case counts dropping in King County, and at Harborview, the number of COVID patients has decreased tenfold from last month to now. But she and her co-workers still feel the burden of COVID.

“There’s lots of relief, the sun is out, cases are down and we can see family and extended family now in ways we couldn’t before,” she said. “But there’s this sense of doom over me that this is probably not our last variant. It’s just sort of waiting for that shoe to drop, but also wanting to take advantage of the levity of the moment.”

She feels mixed about mandates easing. She knows at some point restrictions have to drop, but she works in a hospital where she’s seen the “absolute devastation” of the virus. She has a toddler who is [too young to get vaccinated](#). It seems like it’s happening fast, she said.

Vince Nguyen says he hasn’t thought about his pre-pandemic world in a while.

“I don’t really remember normal anymore,” he said at the SouthEast Seattle Senior Center, which houses the city’s Rainier Beach vaccine clinic. “It’s not just getting back to normal, it’s getting back to normal with everyone on board.”

Nguyen is the Seattle Fire Department’s site supervisor for the clinic, which provides first and second doses, and boosters, to about 80 to 100 people per day. On a recent Thursday, the clinic had 74 appointments scheduled: 17 child doses, 34 adult Pfizer doses and 23 Moderna.

At the vaccination clinic of the same name, though it has since relocated from the Atlantic City Boat Ramp, [more than 100 people used to gather outside the entrance](#) in hopes of scoring a leftover vaccine dose. Interest, or desperation, was so high and supply so low that the last doses came down to who was oldest — sometimes just a few days separated who got a shot and who didn’t.

Eleven months and two variant surges later, Donisha Webster, 29, was surrounded by a dozen empty chairs as she waited after getting her shot. Her job as an aviation mechanic required her to get vaccinated. She feels like the end of the pandemic is near, and some day, we won’t all have to wear masks. When will that be?

“Another two years,” Webster said. “People don’t follow rules.”

But her children, ages 3 and 7, are in school, and she noted there were real fans at the recent Super Bowl in California — not cardboard cutouts like in 2021.

Seattle scenes show how close we are: The line outside Starbucks at Pike Place Market stretches down the block. Two young people who met on Tinder do the awkward introduction outside a bar, then head inside for a drink. Kids run around playgrounds, zooming down slides that were once covered in caution tape.

But it's not quite the same: The Starbucks workers, and some of the tourists, wear masks. The Tinder couple has to — for now — show their vaccination card before weaving through the crowd of bargoers. Parents discuss the playground divisions among the vaccinated big kids and the unvaccinated little ones.

Will it ever be the same as before?

"Nobody is going back to 2019," said Mauseth, with the Department of Health's Behavioral Health Strike Team. "So the idea is not so much returning to normalcy, but being willing to accept the adaptations of life and reengage it in a way that's meaningful. And that will be different for everyone."

Right now, we're reeling from the third large-scale impact in the past 24 months. The original impact was the start of the pandemic, the second was the surge attributed to the delta variant and the third began in December as the [omicron variant caused surges](#) higher than any previous point. When communities experience more than one impact in a short term, Mauseth said, recovery can be more difficult.

That recovery will look different in environments where the virus had disparate effects. Long-term care facilities, for example, [have borne the deadliest brunt](#); facility residents and staff account for 31% of all the state's COVID deaths, according to DOH data.

At the nursing home where Linda Long works, masks are still required, and she's not sure if she'll ever work without a mask again. Washington facilities restrict visitors whenever there is a COVID case; there were more facilities with active cases in February than any previous month, according to the state Department of Social and Health Services.

Long wants to feel good about relaxing restrictions, but she's skeptical.

"It only takes one thing to upset the apple cart, so to speak," she said. "I would very much like to be in the norm, but only after we can get the epidemic taken care of and controlled. And I don't think it's controlled. There are so many variants that keep coming. How can we control it?"

Harborview's Bryson-Cahn, too, feels far from a semblance of a pre-pandemic world.

"Come visit us in the hospital," she said. "We will show you this is not normal yet."

We're not at the end. But there's hope.

"To be a part of this two-year process, you can't do it unless you have hope," Nguyen, the vaccine site supervisor, said. "We know there will be an end."

There are still moments of joy. Bryson-Cahn finds it in her child, born in 2020, a tiny person who has no idea what's going on.

From his eyes, everything is normal.

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HEADLINE	02/27 Putin puts Russia nuclear forces on alert
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-business-europe-moscow-2e4e1cf784f22b6afbe5a2f936725550
GIST	KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — In a dramatic escalation of East-West tensions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian nuclear deterrent forces put on high alert Sunday in response to what he called "aggressive statements" by leading NATO powers.

The order means Putin has ordered Russia's nuclear weapons prepared for increased readiness to launch, raising the threat that the tensions could boil over into a nuclear war. In giving it, the Russian leader also cited hard-hitting financial sanctions imposed by the West against Russia, including Putin himself.

Speaking at a meeting with his top officials, Putin directed the Russian defense minister and the chief of the military's General Staff to put the nuclear deterrent forces in a "special regime of combat duty."

"Western countries aren't only taking unfriendly actions against our country in the economic sphere, but top officials from leading NATO members made aggressive statements regarding our country," Putin said in televised comments.

The alarming step came as street fighting broke out in Ukraine's second-largest city and Russian troops squeezed strategic ports in the country's south, advances that appeared to mark a new phase of Russia's invasion following a wave of attacks on airfields and fuel facilities elsewhere in the country.

The capital, Kyiv, was eerily quiet after huge explosions lit up the morning sky and authorities reported blasts at one of the airports. Only an occasional car appeared on a deserted main boulevard as a strict 39-hour curfew kept people off the streets. Terrified residents instead hunkered down in homes, underground garages and subway stations in anticipation of a full-scale Russian assault.

"The past night was tough – more shelling, more bombing of residential areas and civilian infrastructure," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said. "There is not a single facility in the country that the occupiers wouldn't consider as admissible targets."

Following its gains to the east in the city of Kharkiv and multiple ports, Russia sent a delegation to Belarus for peace talks with Ukraine, according to the Kremlin. Zelenskyy suggested other locations, saying his country was unwilling to meet in Belarus because it served as a staging ground for the invasion.

Until Sunday, Russia's troops had remained on the outskirts of Kharkiv, a city of 1.4 million about 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) south of the border with Russia, while other forces rolled past to press the offensive deeper into Ukraine.

Videos posted on Ukrainian media and social networks showed Russian vehicles moving across Kharkiv and Russian troops roaming the city in small groups. One showed Ukrainian troops firing at the Russians and damaged Russian light utility vehicles abandoned nearby.

The images underscored the determined resistance Russian troops face while attempting to enter Ukraine's bigger cities. Ukrainians have volunteered en masse to help defend the capital, Kyiv, and other cities, taking guns distributed by authorities and preparing firebombs to fight Russian forces.

Ukraine's government also is releasing prisoners with military experience who want to fight for the country, a prosecutor's office official, Andriy Sinyuk, told the Hromadske TV channel Sunday. He did not specify whether the move applied to prisoners convicted of all levels of crimes.

Russian President Vladimir Putin hasn't disclosed his ultimate plans, but Western officials believe he is determined to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own, redrawing the map of Europe and reviving Moscow's Cold War-era influence.

The pressure on strategic ports in the south of Ukraine appeared aimed at seizing control of the country's coastline stretching from the border with Romania in the west to the border with Russia in the east. A Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, said Russian forces had blocked the cities of Kherson on the Black Sea and the port of Berdyansk on the Azov Sea.

He said the Russian forces also took control of an airbase near Kherson and the Azov Sea city of Henichesk. Ukrainian authorities also have reported fighting near Odesa, Mykolaiv and other areas.

Cutting Ukraine's access to its sea ports would deal a major blow to the country's economy. It also could allow Moscow to build a land corridor to Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014 and until now was connected to Russia by a 19-kilometer (12-mile) bridge, the longest bridge in Europe which opened in 2018.

Flames billowed from an oil depot near an airbase in Vasylykiv, a city 37 kilometers (23 miles) south of Kyiv where there has been intense fighting, according to the mayor. Russian forces blew up a gas pipeline in Kharkiv, prompting the government to warn people to cover their windows with damp cloth or gauze as protection from smoke, the president's office said.

Ukrainian military deputy commander Lt.-Gen. Yevhen Moisiuk sounded a defiant note in a message aimed at Russian troops.

"Unload your weapons, raise your hands so that our servicemen and civilians can understand that you have heard us. This is your ticket home," Moisiuk said in a Facebook video.

The number of casualties so far from Europe's largest land conflict since World War II remains unclear amid the fog of combat.

Ukraine's health minister reported Saturday that 198 people, including three children, had been killed and more than 1,000 others wounded. It was unclear whether those figures included both military and civilian casualties. Russia has not released any casualty information.

Ukraine's U.N. ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, tweeted Saturday that Ukraine appealed to the International Committee of the Red Cross "to facilitate repatriation of thousands of bodies of Russian soldiers." An accompanying chart claimed 3,500 Russian troops have been killed.

Laetitia Courtois, ICRC's permanent observer to the U.N., told The Associated Press that the situation in Ukraine was "a limitation for our teams on the ground" and "we therefore cannot confirm numbers or other details."

The United Nations' refugee agency said Sunday that about 368,000 Ukrainians have arrived in neighboring countries since the invasion started Thursday. The U.N. has estimated the conflict could produce as many as 4 million refugees, depending how long it continues.

Zelenskyy denounced Russia's offensive as "state terrorism." He said the attacks on Ukrainian cities should be investigated by an international war crimes tribunal and cost Russia its place as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

"Russia has taken the path of evil, and the world should come to depriving it of its U.N. Security Council seat," he said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said a Russian delegation of military officials and diplomats had arrived Sunday in the Belarusian city of Gomel for talks with Ukraine. Zelenskyy on Friday offered to negotiate a key Russian demand: abandoning ambitions of joining NATO.

Ukraine's president said his country was ready for peace talks but not in Belarus.

"Warsaw, Bratislava, Budapest, Istanbul, Baku, we offered all of them to the Russian side and we will accept any other city in a country that hasn't been used for launching missiles," Zelenskyy said. "Only then the talks could be honest and put an end to the war."

Peskov claimed Ukraine had proposed holding talks in Gomel. He added that the Russian military action was going forward pending the talks start.

Zelenskyy adviser Mykhailo Podolyak dismissed Moscow's offer as "manipulation," adding that Ukraine hadn't agreed to talks in the Belarusian city.

As Russia pushes ahead with its offensive, the West is working to equip the outnumbered Ukrainian forces with weapons and ammunition while punishing Russia with far-reaching sanctions intended to further isolate Moscow.

The U.S. pledged an additional \$350 million in military assistance to Ukraine, including anti-tank weapons, body armor and small arms. Germany said it would send missiles and anti-tank weapons to the besieged country and that it would close its airspace to Russian planes.

The U.S., European Union and United Kingdom agreed to block "selected" Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial messaging system, which moves money around more than 11,000 banks and other financial institutions worldwide, part of a new round of sanctions aiming to impose a severe cost on Moscow for the invasion. They also agreed to impose "restrictive measures" on Russia's central bank.

Responding to a request from Ukraine's minister of digital transformation, tech billionaire Elon Musk said on Twitter that his satellite-based internet system Starlink was now active in Ukraine and that there were "more terminals en route."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, meanwhile, said Sunday that his country is committing 100 billion euros (\$112.7 billion) to a special fund for its armed forces, raising its defense spending above 2% of gross domestic product. Scholz told a special session of the Bundestag the investment was needed "to protect our freedom and our democracy."

Putin sent troops into Ukraine after denying for weeks that he intended to do so, all the while building up a force of almost 200,000 troops along the countries' borders. He claims the West has failed to take seriously Russia's security concerns about NATO, the Western military alliance that Ukraine aspires to join. But he has also expressed scorn about Ukraine's right to exist as an independent state.

Russia claims its assault on Ukraine is aimed only at military targets, but bridges, schools and residential neighborhoods have been hit.

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.S., Oksana Markarova, said Ukraine was gathering evidence of shelling of residential areas, kindergartens and hospitals to submit to an international war crimes court in The Hague as possible crimes against humanity. The International Criminal Court's prosecutor has said he is monitoring the conflict closely.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss warned Sunday that Putin could use "the most unsavory means," including banned chemical or biological weapons, to defeat Ukraine.

"I urge the Russians not to escalate this conflict, but we do need to be prepared for Russia to seek to use even worse weapons," Truss told Sky News.

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HEADLINE	02/26 World shuns Putin; faces resistance
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/26/the-world-shuns-pariah-putin
GIST	<p>Vladimir Putin was facing growing international isolation and the prospect of pariah status on Saturday night as long-term allies dramatically turned against him following the invasion of Ukraine, and western nations planned further decisive military and financial action against Moscow.</p> <p>As his hopes of a quick victory evaporated in the face of fierce resistance by Ukrainian soldiers and armies of citizen volunteers, Russia's president was deserted by his key ally, China, and had his ultimatum demanding Kyiv's surrender defiantly brushed aside by Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.</p>

In perhaps the most striking development, [Germany](#) announced on Saturday night that it would supply Ukrainian troops with 1,000 anti-tank weapons as well as 500 Stinger missiles from its own military reserves.

“The Russian assault on Ukraine marks a turning point,” Germany’s chancellor, [Olaf Scholz](#), said, signalling a major shift in his country’s postwar military stance. “It threatens our entire postwar order. In this situation it is our duty to support Ukraine to the best of our ability in its defence against the invasive army of Vladimir Putin. Germany stands closely on the side of Ukraine.”

Significantly, the German government was also said to be bowing to intense pressure from Britain, the US and Canada to ban Russia from the crucial Swift banking payments system after [repeated appeals from Kyiv for the west to do so](#). Sources in Berlin said German ministers’ views were shifting on the issue and they were actively discussing measures that “would hit the right people”, having previously resisted, partly because of fears that a ban would affect the flow of funds to aid agencies in Russia.

In further blows to Putin, Hungary’s leader, Viktor Orbán, long seen as friendly towards Moscow, abandoned his support, saying he would back all EU sanctions against [Russia](#), while Turkey was reported to be considering blocking the passage of Russian naval vessels into the Black Sea.

As a global diplomatic outcry intensified, Russia’s defence ministry ominously announced it was ordering “all units to advance in all sectors” as it accused [Ukraine](#) of refusing to negotiate. And in a desperate attempt to restore a positive narrative in the information war, the Kremlin banned street protests and restricted access to social media such as Facebook. A growing list of Russian celebrities and influencers announced they backed global efforts to stop the war.

Having held off Russian forces for two nights, morale in Kyiv remained high among Ukrainians of all ages and from all walks of life, as many queued to take up arms. Many also gleefully shared videos of unarmed civilians rushing into the road to stop advancing convoys and fearlessly berating Russian soldiers about why they had come to Ukraine. Around the country, Russian forces were not confirmed as having control of a single major city, while Zelenskiy remained in Kyiv and told Americans who offered to evacuate him: “The fight is here. I need ammunition, not a ride.”

Adding to the sense of crisis enveloping the Kremlin, the US said it would send a further \$350m (£260m) of military assistance to Ukraine, taking its total for the past 12 months to more than \$1bn; Nato moved more troops and weaponry to eastern member states bordering Russia and Belarus; and a [sporting boycott mushroomed](#), with Russia facing a ban from motor racing and Poland refusing to play a World Cup football game. YouTube barred the Russian state-owned media outlet RT and other Russian channels from receiving money for advertisements that run with their videos.

Opposition to the invasion also spilled over into the UK’s Premier League football programme. At the game between Manchester City and Everton, the Everton players came out draped in Ukrainian flags while Manchester City wore shirts bearing the words “No War”.

The head coach of Chelsea, which is owned by the Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich – who last week was named in parliament as one of 35 oligarchs and “enablers” of the Putin regime – even suggested that he would be “happy to lose” Sunday’s Carabao Cup final against Liverpool.

“Given the situation, that we have a war, this is simply not important enough,” said Thomas Tuchel. “It unfortunately will not help, but, if it would, I am happy to lose the match.”

On Saturday night, Abramovich announced he was [handing “stewardship” of the club to the trustees of its charitable foundation](#).

In London, the Ministry of Defence announced that Challenger 2 tanks and armoured vehicles from the Royal Welsh Battlegroup had arrived in Estonia from Germany, with further equipment and about 1,000 troops following over the coming days.

	<p>The defence secretary, Ben Wallace, said the aim was to stop invasions of Nato member states: “Alongside our Nato allies, these deployments constitute a credible deterrent to stop Russian aggression threatening the territorial sovereignty of member states.”</p> <p>On Saturday, Russian advances on major cities, including Kyiv, appeared to have slowed or ground to a halt. Ukraine’s defence ministry claimed Russia had suffered more than 3,000 casualties and that many other soldiers had been captured.</p> <p>UK and other diplomats said a decision by China to abstain rather than back its ally Russia in a UN resolution on the invasion was being viewed as a huge victory for the west. Beijing called on both Moscow and Kyiv to find a negotiated settlement.</p> <p>Ukraine’s health minister reported on Saturday that 198 people had been killed, including three children, and that more than 1,000 others had been wounded since the Russian offensive started before dawn on Thursday with massive air and missile strikes and troops forging into Ukraine from the north, east and south.</p> <p>Among the Kyiv buildings hit in the latest wave of Russian strikes was a high-rise residential building. Kyiv’s mayor, Vitali Klitschko, posted an image showing a gaping hole in one side of the building and damaged apartments on several floors.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Pronounce, spell ‘Kyiv’ and why it matters
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/25/how-to-pronounce-and-spell-kyiv-kiev-ukraine-and-why-it-matters
GIST	<p>Kiev or Kyiv?</p> <p>As Russian forces menace the Ukrainian capital and thousands flee, the very least onlookers around the world can do is learn how to say the name of the city under siege.</p> <p>The short answer is simple: Ukrainians call their capital “Kyiv” (kee-yiv), the spelling, a transliteration of the Ukrainian Київ. The Russian version is “Kiev” (kee-yev).</p> <p>The latter, based on transliteration from the Russian cyrillic Киев, became the internationally accepted name through the Soviet period and into the first years of this century, its recognisability enhanced perhaps by the eponymous chicken dish that became popular in the west in the 1970s.</p> <p>But it is now associated with the Russification of Ukraine, and in recent years more and more publications, governments, airports and geographical dictionaries have switched the spelling to the Ukrainian variant.</p> <p>“When I meet someone new, I like to pronounce their name the way they want it pronounced in their language, which is why I think it’s right to pronounce it ‘Kyiv’ as close to the Ukrainian as possible,” said Andrii Smytsniuk, Ukrainian language teacher at Cambridge University.</p> <p>“Many Ukrainians see this as a sign of respect for their language and identity.”</p> <p>The reason for the difference between the two is bound up in centuries of linguistic evolution in a region that has fallen under Mongol, Lithuanian, Polish and Russian empires over the past 1,000 years. Russian and Ukrainian are both east Slavonic languages (as opposed to west Slavonic languages such as Polish, and south Slavonic ones like Bulgarian).</p> <p>“They all come from an original root, but diverged in the ways that languages do,” says Monica White, associate professor in Russian and Slavonic studies at Nottingham University.</p>

	<p>Ukrainian took on some Polish influences during the early modern period. Several Ukrainian vowels ended up being pronounced quite differently from their Russian counterparts – not an unusual thing in languages when you think about how the word “time” is pronounced in Melbourne, Middlesbrough and Mississippi.</p> <p>There are several letters of the alphabet unique to Ukrainian, for example the <i>ï</i> in Київ, and enough differences in vocabulary to make it hard for Russophones to understand Ukrainians when they speak in their tongue.</p> <p>Not surprisingly, the Ukrainian government mounted a campaign four years ago to secure international approval for the name of its capital city. There is even a popular Twitter hashtag, #KyivNotKiev.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Inflation 40yr-high; Russia war worsens it
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/27/russia-ukraine-inflation-us-oil-economy-green-energy
GIST	<p>“I will not pretend this will be painless,” Joe Biden warned Americans before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. And as the war disrupts already hard-hit international trade, US consumers are likely to soon see just how painful the consequences of the conflict will be in the US.</p> <p>Inflation is already at a 40-year high in the US and, depending on the length and depth of Russia’s war, any further disruption could cause prices to rise at the pump and perhaps on store shelves.</p> <p>The invasion could also have potential long-term implications for Biden’s green energy transition since a significant amount of key metals are mined and produced there, including nickel, palladium and aluminum.</p> <p>While US-Russian trade is relatively small, the country is home to a broad range of natural resources, from crude oil to wheat. Prices for those natural resources soared following Russia’s incursion, although most are off the highs they hit when the invasion began.</p> <p>On Thursday, Nymex futures prices for the most active crude oil and gasoline contracts – an indication of the future cost of buying oil – spiked to their highest levels since July 2014, with the US benchmark West Texas Intermediate briefly touching \$100 a barrel and reformulated gasoline prices rising as high as \$3.07 a gallon.</p> <p>Wheat prices continued their climb on Friday as fighting continued. Chicago Board of Trade wheat prices were trending higher before Russia’s invasion, but spiked higher still on Thursday and Friday, rising at one point to their highest level since April 2008.</p> <p>Russia and Ukraine collectively are known as Europe’s breadbasket, responsible for 30% of the world’s export supply of wheat. Much of that is shipped through the Black Sea to the Middle East and African countries, which take advantage of lower prices and shipping costs from the region.</p> <p>Uncertainty regarding Russian president Vladimir Putin’s intention are inflating commodity prices across the board, but wheat prices also remain high because of significantly tight global supplies. Dry weather conditions in the US and in other top-growing regions globally limited harvests, and the Covid pandemic increased demand while snarling logistics. In addition to poor weather, many US farmers preferred to plant corn and soya beans versus wheat because of persistently low prices, with sowings last year at 100-year lows.</p> <p>Low global wheat stocks will make it harder for other countries such as the US, Canada and Australia to cover a possible global shortfall out of Ukraine, “and now you have a war in that area. Where this (prices) will go is a major, major question mark,” said Sean Lusk, vice-president of the commercial hedging division for Walsh Trading.</p>

With inflation up 7.5% in January over last year, higher food and energy costs are already the two biggest concerns consumers have right now, said Rob Haworth, senior investment strategy director at US Bank Wealth Management. Food prices rose 7% year-over-year in the January consumer prices index report, while energy costs gained 27%.

The ramifications of Russia's invasion are most likely to appear first at the gas station. Further increases in energy costs come as the world is already dealing with critically low energy inventories. Jay Hatfield, portfolio manager at Infrastructure Capital Advisors, says the current futures prices for gasoline could translate to \$4 a gallon for retail prices in a few weeks, up from the current national average of \$3.54. "That's going to be an enormous political problem," Hatfield said.

US crude oil production is slowly increasing, but it won't be enough to make inventories rise, said Peter McNally, global sector lead for industrials, materials and energy at consultancy Third Bridge. Part of the US's problem is refinery capacity, which fell by a 1m-plus barrels a day during the pandemic, limiting how much fuel can be produced. That could be a problem for the summer driving season when demand peaks. "We've got a couple months here to see if we can build enough product inventory to meet that demand," he said.

The Federal Reserve was poised to raise interest rates next month to combat higher inflation, but the Russian conflict adds to the central bank's problem, Haworth said, which will have to weigh a geopolitical shock with an aggressive attempt to tame inflation.

One long-term implication if the Russian-Ukraine war continues is how commodity producers and end-users grapple with the global push for clean energy investment. Russia is a major nickel miner, a metal used in battery production, and aluminum, used in most industrial products. It also is a top palladium producer, used in catalytic converters. So far, western nations haven't targeted commodity exports and Russia hasn't stopped sales. But the commodity experts point out there's been several years of low capital investment across the complex, which led to reduced inventories, even before Covid messed up supply chains. Building infrastructure, such as new mines, takes years.

Roland Harris, portfolio manager for the commodity index strategy at VanEck, says the energy transition story is going to play out over a number of years, meanwhile, supply issues will take a while to work out. He thinks inflation will be much longer-lasting, whether it's trade disputes or countries trying to secure their own national resources. That's going to hit US consumers long-term at a time where prices are already high.

"We're seeing the end of globalization. Trade friction, countries trying to secure resources, all those things are inflationary," he said.

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HEADLINE	02/26 New brand sticker shock hits car market
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-new-brand-of-sticker-shock-hits-the-car-market-11645851648?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>How hard is it to buy a car today? For Kevin Peters, it recently involved a one-way flight and 330-mile road trip to avoid overpaying for a new truck.</p> <p>Mr. Peters initially spent three weeks shopping around San Diego for a new F-150 Lariat pickup, only to encounter extra charges of \$5,000 to \$8,000 above the suggested retail price. He decided to fly to a dealership in Las Vegas, where he got what is considered a bargain: He paid the sticker price of \$73,520.</p> <p>"The rules have changed so dramatically," he said. "Despite being armed with information, the dealer's position is 'This is kind of a take-it-or-leave-it proposition.' "</p> <p>Pandemic-related supply chain problems are stretching the new-vehicle shortage into a second year, with near-empty dealer lots, sky-high prices and monthslong waits for new wheels. The prolonged disruption is</p>

now exposing fault lines in the car business's century-old retailing model and prompting a broader rethinking of the entrenched way Americans buy cars.

Consumers are revolting. Like Mr. Peters, many are expanding their searches outside their hometowns and even across state lines. Some are banding together online to call out dealers charging the biggest markups. Others have taken their concerns directly to automotive CEOs via personal letters.

Car companies say they don't want dealers charging above sticker and in some cases are [pushing back](#), but dealerships are independent businesses that control the final transaction.

Many dealers say they must make do with their scant vehicle supplies and be realistic about what the market will bear, especially for high-demand models. In extreme cases, dealerships are charging \$35,000 to \$40,000 above the manufacturer's suggested retail price, or MSRP, on luxury cars that normally sell for \$80,000 or more.

Before the pandemic, practically nobody paid above the sticker price for a new car. Last month, an unprecedented 82% of buyers did, according to consumer research site Edmunds.com.

Dealers, for their part, are divided on the practice. Some say the upcharges are a reasonable reflection of the upside-down market, and that the auto industry is one of many where such inflation is visible, especially for small dealers trying to compensate for choked inventories.

Other dealerships on principle say they don't charge above MSRP, with the exception of some new, high-demand models. They say the practice can permanently damage their reputation with buyers and hurt repeat business.

In today's market, though, it is becoming more difficult to refrain from charging more, especially as it becomes commonplace, the dealers say.

Mike Stanford, a Ford -Lincoln dealer in southeast Michigan, said he doesn't charge above the sticker and has tried to hold the line even on popular models in short supply.

But he said it's a decision that can sometimes leave him feeling burned. For instance, a buyer walked into his dealership recently looking for a Ford Bronco. The buyer indicated he was a Bronco fan, Mr. Stanford recalled, and told the sales manager he was excited to drive in a local park with his wife with the car's removable top off. The dealership sold the vehicle for the \$54,000 sticker price.

The next day, his staff saw the same Bronco listed for resale online for \$20,000 more—using the dealership's own photos of the vehicle, he said.

"I don't think it is right to gouge the customer," he said. "But I don't think it is right for customers to gouge us, either. But that's the market today."

Ford declined to comment on specific customer experiences but said dealers are independent and set final prices.

Some car companies are pushing back on dealer markups, worried that perceived price gouging will turn off customers and hurt their brand images. The reputational risks are higher than ever, with Tesla Inc. and other new electric-car startups offering buyers a way to skip the dealership and buy directly from the manufacturer, sidestepping the car-lot haggling that many buyers dislike.

General Motors Co. , FordMotor Co. and Hyundai Motor Co. have warned dealers that they could have their vehicle shipments reduced if they are caught significantly marking up cars. But car companies are limited in what actions they can take, due to state franchise laws that protect a dealership's autonomy.

“The whole model is broken,” said Kat Adair, a 55-year-old Texas resident who recently purchased a new car.

Ms. Adair said she has always dreaded dealership negotiations, but this time, the experience was particularly grueling. After she and her husband got quotes for \$10,000 to \$15,000 above MSRP, they were relieved to buy a Toyota 4Runner for what she described as a steal: \$2,000 over its sticker price of about \$49,000.

“I don’t feel like it’s fair that you have to be a good negotiator to get a fair price,” she said.

A Toyota representative declined to discuss specific customer experiences.

For decades, American consumers have been conditioned to expect a deal on a new car. Advertisements promoting factory-cash rebates and other discounts have long been a staple of the car business. Dealers, who act as middlemen, control the final price, because they own the vehicle.

The MSRP is required by law to be displayed on the window sticker. Historically there has been ample supply, and most car buyers pay a price that represents a discount from MSRP—anywhere from a few thousand dollars to as much as \$10,000 in the competitive market for big pickup trucks.

The prolonged inventory shortage has flipped this traditional car-buying dynamic.

Auto makers haven’t recovered from the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, when nearly all auto factories in North America shut down for almost two months. A computer-chip shortage that emerged in late 2020 continues to depress factory output, further hamstringing efforts to catch up. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine this past week could portend more supply-chain snarls in the future.

The number of cars and trucks on dealership lots hit a record low of about 973,000 in September 2021, according to research firm Wards Intelligence. Vehicle stocks were about 1.1 million last month, roughly one-third the historical norm. Demand remains strong, helping push prices on both new and used cars to records.

Dealer markups—used sparingly before the pandemic—have become pervasive. Buyers last month paid an average of \$728 above the sticker, or 1.6% on average. That represents a reversal from a year earlier, when vehicles sold for an average of \$2,152 below MSRP, according to Edmunds.

Dealerships are required to disclose the price increase, sometimes called a market adjustment, on the label. The higher price also can take different forms, such as dealers add-ons like wheel protection and brake-light features that would otherwise be optional but are now required as part of the higher price.

James Brands, a 79-year-old resident of upstate New York, was so shocked about the price inflation he encountered trying to buy a Ford Maverick pickup truck that he decided to write a letter to Ford Chief Executive Jim Farley.

Mr. Brands said he was dismayed to find the dealership had tacked on \$6,480 to the list price of the Maverick, a \$20,000 truck that Ford touts as a more affordable alternative to its bigger, more expensive vehicles.

“Many of your Ford dealers are, in my opinion, stabbing you and Ford Motor Company in the back,” Mr. Brands wrote in a letter that he shared with The Wall Street Journal.

Sherry Farag, a Florida physician, said that she has soured on the Cadillac brand after her experience last month trying to buy a new Escalade SUV. The luxury model lists for \$73,000 to around \$100,000, but the four dealerships she contacted added another \$15,000 to \$35,000 to the price, she said.

"I don't want the car that badly and would probably never look to drive one in the future, even if the market adjusted down," she said.

A Cadillac spokesman declined to comment on individual transactions but said the brand doesn't condone dealerships charging above MSRP, and said most don't.

Karen Patton was so fed up with seeing widespread markups on the Ford Bronco, a popular SUV that went on sale in 2021, that she posted a 1,500-word message on an online Bronco forum. When the pricing of her vehicle changed after she had reserved it, she encouraged readers to document each dealer interaction to combat late-stage markups. She even dropped the name of a Ford communications manager to contact if the dealer doesn't budge.

Ms. Patton also included tips on how to avoid overpaying, such as encouraging customers to bring a spouse or older relative to the dealership and have them "release the waterworks."

"I bought new cars off of a lot before, and it was just never like this," Ms. Patton said.

Other shoppers are permanently defecting to Tesla, which has no dealerships and instead sells cars through its company-owned stores or its website. While Tesla has raised prices over the past year, some shoppers say they prefer knowing the price upfront, and newer electric car companies are following Tesla's lead on sales.

After her experience buying the 4Runner, Ms. Adair said she would stick to buying from Tesla from now on. She said she ordered a Model Y compact SUV in August, before she bought the Toyota, and found the process much smoother, mostly because the advertised price is what consumers end up paying.

"I will never buy another car from another regular dealership again after this," Ms. Adair added.

For many smaller dealerships, the financial hardship of losing sales revenue to the inventory shortage is driving them to charge more for the vehicles they do have in stock, said Paul Walser, chairman of the National Automobile Dealers Association, a trade group representing more than 16,000 U.S. dealerships.

Cal Thomas, who until recently owned a Chevrolet and Buick dealership in Florida, said his lots were so empty that he wasn't sure his business would survive. He resorted to marking up some vehicles sold to other dealerships, but said he refused to charge customers more. He ultimately decided to sell his dealership, because he wasn't making enough to sustain operations on what little inventory he had.

Mr. Thomas said he sympathizes with smaller dealerships, like his, that struggled during the past two years. "I think it's a shame that dealers are put in that situation," he said, adding that he has had to take pay cuts to keep his business going.

Ford's Mr. Farley expressed frustration on a recent earnings call that roughly 10% of the brand's dealerships were selling vehicles above sticker. He said future supplies of sought-after vehicles may be withheld from dealers who are flagged. "We have very good intelligence of who they are," he said.

A letter from Hyundai's top U.S. sales executive, Randy Parker, sent to dealers this past Tuesday warned that charging above MSRP risks alienating customers. Dealers found to be doing so could have vehicle shipments curtailed and advertising support cut, he said.

"With great regularity our customers around the country are voicing displeasure," Mr. Parker wrote.

Other auto makers such as Kia and Volkswagen emphasized that the dealers are independent franchises and have control over pricing, although they stressed customer experience is paramount and dealers should avoid upcharging when possible.

Some auto makers, such as Toyota and Honda, are pulling individual dealers aside to talk about their charging above MSRP. Jack Hollis, Toyota Motor North America's senior vice president of auto operations, said the company has encouraged dealers to look at the bigger picture instead of trying to capitalize on of the current market.

"If you're thinking about it in the short term, I think you're mis-stepping.," said Mr. Hollis. "If that customer experience is great during this time, they'll be with you."

Car companies are also trying to make longer-term changes internally to help stabilize pricing and improve the experience, especially as they gear up to challenge Tesla in the electric-vehicle market.

Ford, GM and other auto makers have said they envision customer orders being a bigger part of the business in the future, a departure from the historical norm, in which American shoppers have picked cars straight off the lot, often driving them home the same day. While preordered cars still are delivered through the dealer, that process should give car companies more control over pricing and allow them to plan production schedules better, analysts and executives say.

Still, auto executives and analysts expect the dearth of new cars and lofty prices to stick around at least into 2023. While the computer-chip problem is expected to gradually ease through this year, dealership inventories are so thin and underlying vehicle demand so strong that it is expected to take at least a year to substantially restock lots.

Mike Manley, CEO of AutoNation Inc., the U.S.'s largest dealership chain by sales, said fewer than 2% of vehicles at AutoNation were sold above sticker last year.

Longer-term, said Mr. Manley, who also is also a former car company CEO, dealerships are going to stock fewer vehicles with more limited options, and custom ordering will become more the norm. Already, much of AutoNation's incoming vehicle inventory has been presold to buyers who had previously placed factory orders through its stores, the company said.

"There are going to be a number of changes in the coming years and this will be the catalyst," Mr. Manley said.

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HEADLINE	02/27 Residents flee Hong Kong zero-Covid policy
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kongs-covid-19-regime-sparks-rush-for-exit-by-spooked-residents-11645963200?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>HONG KONG—For Charles Murton, one of Hong Kong's tens of thousands of expatriate residents, the city's surprise decision to shut schools next month to test its 7.4 million people for Covid-19 was the last straw.</p> <p>He has been drawing up plans to leave the city he immigrated to as a teenager, eyeing a move with his wife and two young children to Singapore, a perennial Hong Kong rival that continues to open its borders even as Covid-19 numbers there surge to record highs.</p> <p>"The virus is something that you've got to live with, but that doesn't seem to be the thought process here," Mr. Murton said.</p> <p>For two years, Hong Kong largely shut out Covid-19 by at times banning travelers from certain high-risk countries, using lengthy quarantines for arrivals and social distancing, and isolating infected people and their close contacts—at the cost of effectively cutting off the global financial hub's residents from the outside world. Now, after the Omicron variant punctured the city's defenses, overwhelming hospitals and testing facilities, the city is tightening the screws in new and unpredictable ways to adhere to Beijing's zero-Covid policy of stamping out the virus whenever it appears.</p>

For residents frustrated by the lack of a clear pathway out of Hong Kong's restrictions, the latest clampdown clashes with the picture in the U.S., Europe and other parts of the world, where governments are dismantling the most intrusive pandemic-control measures and [seeking a return to a more normal life](#), aided by high vaccination rates.

Hong Kong's heavy-handed response risks turning what has been a stream of residents leaving the city into a flood. Immigration data shows nearly 69,000 more Hong Kong residents have left the city than arrived this year, with almost 80% of those leaving in February, marking the biggest monthly drain since January 2020, when the data began. It isn't clear how many have gone for good. The latest government figures available show the city's population shrank by more than 75,000 in mid-2021 from a year earlier.

The scurry for the exit is visible in hastily canceled doctors' appointments, children taking online classes while on the airport shuttle and a rush to find tenants to take over apartment leases. Ticket prices have soared for the few flights out of the city, with some travel agents saying that clients are more willing to consider any plane that gets them out of Hong Kong before the new measures are implemented.

The city's residents contend with a pandemic-control arsenal with few parallels in the West. Most nonresidents are barred from entering, and returning travelers must pay for weekslong hotel quarantines no matter their test results or vaccination status. While other economies are ditching restrictions, Hong Kong has banned gatherings of more than two people and indoor dining after 6 p.m., and shut gyms, bars, hair salons and even campsites. Starting last Thursday, the unvaccinated can no longer shop in supermarkets and malls.

Despite these measures, the city has recorded more than 126,000 cases since Dec. 31 through Saturday, about 10 times the number of infections seen in 2020 and 2021 combined.

Under pressure from Beijing to end the outbreak, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announced plans to test all the city's residents three times in March, adopting a tactic that has proved effective on the mainland in identifying every carrier of the virus in a given area and putting them in isolation or hospitals.

The government said it needs the school campuses to process the one million tests a day required to achieve that goal. Still, the unexpected decision brings forward the summer holiday, wrecking the travel plans of families and creating uncertainty over university-entrance exams for final-year students.

City authorities will also commandeer hotels and empty apartment blocks and build isolation centers to house the tens of thousands of people who are expected to test positive in the mass screening campaign.

In a stark warning of what that might mean for families, an 11-month-old baby who tested positive was separated from her parents at one of the city's public hospitals. The Health Authority said it wasn't possible for the parents to remain with their daughter because both of them had tested negative. While the infant is now reunited with her parents, the incident rattled many parents who fear a similar outcome from the mass screening.

Doris Chiu, who runs a travel agency, said the risks of being forced into isolation pushed her to accelerate plans to move with her 4-year-old daughter to Washington, D.C.

"I want to avoid the citywide compulsory testing," she said.

The Hong Kong native said she had lost faith in the government's ability to manage the pandemic. "It's going to be a mess," she said. "It's going to kill the economy further because they've pretty much [brought] everything to a standstill."

Businesses have long complained about the government's handling of the pandemic, saying travel and other restrictions had made it hard to recruit and retain employees. Industry experts say the latest shift in pandemic policy will likely make matters worse, accelerating a trend that has seen the number of regional

headquarters of multinationals in Hong Kong drop by 5% since 2018—a figure reduced by the arrival of more mainland Chinese companies.

Yossi Shabat, 62 years old, plans to relocate to Manila after more than three decades in Hong Kong, motivated by the Philippines' dropping its quarantine requirement earlier this year. "I cannot manage my company business here in Southeast Asia from home using MS Teams or Zoom. The relationship with the customer is impacted," said Mr. Shabat, who works for an Israeli-American IT company.

"Hong Kong was known to be an excellent hub," he said. "You could fly from here to everywhere freely. The last two years, it doesn't happen anymore. It's easier to take off to different places of the world, from either Singapore or Manila or Bangkok."

To be sure, the end of Hong Kong as a global financial and commercial hub has been predicted many times before.

Joe Chu, Hong Kong manager of movers Vanpac GroupAsia, said that while inquiries about relocations from expats in Hong Kong are running at about double the usual level, he has seen big outflows of both Hong Kongers and foreign residents several times, notably during the SARS epidemic in 2003 and before the 1997 handover of the former British colony to China. He has also seen people return.

"On past experience, people leave, and after a few years they come back," he said.

Like many of those The Wall Street Journal spoke to, including Mr. Shabat and Mr. Murton, Kevin Shee said his decision to leave Hong Kong could change if the government relaxes its policies.

Mr. Shee, who runs a storage business, said he is taking his family to Singapore and Bali in March and will make a final decision on whether to abandon Hong Kong further down the line.

"If the situation doesn't improve by next year, and the quarantine rules are still rigid, I won't return to Hong Kong anymore and live in Singapore," he said.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Russia hits Ukraine fuel supplies, airfields
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/26/russian-forces-blow-gas-pipeline-kharkiv/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia unleashed a wave of attacks on Ukraine targeting airfields and fuel facilities in what appeared to be the next phase of an invasion that has been slowed by fierce resistance. The U.S. and EU responded with weapons and ammunition for the outnumbered Ukrainians and powerful sanctions intended to further isolate Moscow.</p> <p>Huge explosions lit up the sky early Sunday south of the capital, Kyiv, where people hunkered down in homes, underground garages and subway stations in anticipation of a full-scale assault by Russian forces.</p> <p>Flames billowed into the sky before dawn from an oil depot near an air base in Vasylykiv, where there has been intense fighting, according to the town's mayor. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said another explosion was at the civilian Zhuliany airport.</p> <p>Zelenskyy's office also said Russian forces blew up a gas pipeline in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, prompting the government to warn people to protect themselves from the smoke by covering their windows with damp cloth or gauze.</p> <p>"We will fight for as long as needed to liberate our country," Zelenskyy vowed.</p> <p>Terrified men, women and children sought safety inside and underground, and the government maintained a 39-hour curfew to keep people off the streets. More than 150,000 Ukrainians fled for Poland, Moldova and other neighboring countries, and the United Nations warned the number could grow to 4 million if fighting escalates.</p>

President Vladimir Putin hasn't disclosed his ultimate plans, but Western officials believe he is determined to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own, redrawing the map of Europe and reviving Moscow's Cold War-era influence.

To aid Ukraine's ability to hold out, the U.S. pledged an additional \$350 million in military assistance to Ukraine, including anti-tank weapons, body armor and small arms. Germany said it would send missiles and anti-tank weapons to the besieged country and that it would close its airspace to Russian planes.

The U.S., European Union and the United Kingdom agreed to block "selected" Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial messaging system, which moves money around more than 11,000 banks and other financial institutions worldwide, part of a new round of sanctions aiming to impose a severe cost on Moscow for the invasion. They also agreed to impose "restrictive measures" on Russia's central bank.

It was unclear how much territory Russian forces had seized or to what extent their advance had been stalled. Britain's Ministry of Defense said "the speed of the Russian advance has temporarily slowed likely as a result of acute logistical difficulties and strong Ukrainian resistance."

A senior U.S. defense official said more than half the Russian combat power that was massed along Ukraine's borders had entered the country and Moscow has had to commit more fuel supply and other support units inside Ukraine than originally anticipated. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. assessments.

The curfew forcing everyone in Kyiv inside was set to last through Monday morning. The relative quiet of the capital was sporadically broken by gunfire.

Fighting on the city's outskirts suggested that small Russian units were trying to clear a path for the main forces. Small groups of Russian troops were reported inside Kyiv, but Britain and the U.S. said the bulk of the forces were 19 miles (30 kilometers) from the city's center as of Saturday afternoon.

Russia claims its assault on Ukraine from the north, east and south is aimed only at military targets, but bridges, schools and residential neighborhoods have been hit.

Ukraine's health minister reported Saturday that 198 people, including three children, had been killed and more than 1,000 others wounded during Europe's largest land war since World War II. It was unclear whether those figures included both military and civilian casualties.

A missile struck a high-rise apartment building in Kyiv's southwestern outskirts near one of the city's two passenger airports, leaving a jagged hole of ravaged apartments over several floors. A rescue worker said six civilians were injured.

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.S., Oksana Markarova, said troops in Kyiv were fighting Russian "sabotage groups." Ukraine says some 200 Russian soldiers have been captured and thousands killed.

Markarova said Ukraine was gathering evidence of shelling of residential areas, kindergartens and hospitals to submit to The Hague as possible crimes against humanity.

Zelenskyy reiterated his openness to talks with Russia in a video message, saying he welcomed an offer from Turkey and Azerbaijan to organize diplomatic efforts, which so far have faltered.

The Kremlin confirmed a phone call between Putin and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev but gave no hint of restarting talks. A day earlier, Zelenskyy offered to negotiate a key Russian demand: abandoning ambitions of joining NATO.

Putin sent troops into Ukraine after denying for weeks that he intended to do so, all the while building up a force of almost 200,000 troops along the countries' borders. He claims the West has failed to take

seriously Russia's security concerns about NATO, the Western military alliance that Ukraine aspires to join. But he has also expressed scorn about Ukraine's right to exist as an independent state.

The effort was already coming at great cost to Ukraine, and apparently to Russian forces as well.

Ukrainian artillery fire destroyed a Russian train delivering diesel to troops heading toward Kyiv from the east, said Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to the interior minister.

The country's Infrastructure Ministry said a Russian missile was shot down early Saturday as it headed for the dam of the sprawling reservoir that serves Kyiv. The government also said a Russian convoy was destroyed. Video images showed soldiers inspecting burned-out vehicles after Ukraine's 101st brigade reported destroying a column of two light vehicles, two trucks and a tank. The claim could not be verified.

Highways into Kyiv from the east were dotted with checkpoints manned by Ukrainian troops and young men in civilian clothes carrying automatic rifles. Low-flying planes patrolled the skies, though it was unclear if they were Russian or Ukrainian.

In addition to Kyiv, the Russian assault appeared to focus on Ukraine's economically vital coastal areas, from near the Black Sea port of Odesa in the west to beyond the Azov Sea port of Mariupol in the east.

Ukrainian soldiers in Mariupol guarded bridges and blocked people from the shoreline amid concerns the Russian navy could launch an assault from the sea.

"I don't care anymore who wins and who doesn't," said Ruzanna Zubenko, whose large family was forced from their home outside Mariupol after it was badly damaged by shelling. "The only important thing is for our children to be able to grow up smiling and not crying."

Fighting also raged in two eastern territories controlled by pro-Russia separatists. Authorities in Donetsk said hot water supplies to the city of about 900,000 were suspended because of damage to the system by Ukrainian shelling.

The U.S. government urged Zelenskyy early Saturday to evacuate Kyiv but he turned down the offer, according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation. Zelenskyy issued a defiant video recorded on a downtown street, saying he remained in the city.

"We aren't going to lay down weapons. We will protect the country," he said. "Our weapon is our truth, and our truth is that it's our land, our country, our children. And we will defend all of that."

Hungary and Poland both opened their borders to Ukrainians.

Refugees arriving in the Hungarian border town of Zahony said men between the ages of 18 and 60 were not being allowed to leave Ukraine.

"My son was not allowed to come. My heart is so sore, I'm shaking," said Vilma Sugar, 68.

At Poland's Medyka crossing, some said they had walked for 15 miles (35 kilometers) to reach the border.

"They didn't have food, no tea, they were standing in the middle of a field, on the road, kids were freezing," Iryna Wiklenko said as she waited on the Polish side for her grandchildren and daughter-in-law to make it across.

Officials in Kyiv urged residents to stay away from windows to avoid debris or bullets.

Shelves were sparsely stocked at grocery stores and pharmacies, and people worried how long food and medicine supplies might last.

	<p>The U.S. and its allies have beefed up forces on NATO's eastern flank but so far have ruled out deploying troops to fight Russia. Instead, the U.S., the European Union and other countries have slapped wide-ranging sanctions on Russia, freezing the assets of businesses and individuals including Putin and his foreign minister.</p> <p>Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council, warned that Moscow could react by opting out of the last remaining nuclear arms pact, freezing Western assets and cutting diplomatic ties.</p> <p>"There is no particular need in maintaining diplomatic relations," Medvedev said. "We may look at each other in binoculars and gunsights."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Germany double-barrel shift to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/26/germany-weapons-swift-russia-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Germany on Saturday took significant steps toward shedding its post-World War II caution about being a significant global security player, announcing it would deliver extensive lethal weaponry to Ukraine and embracing broad restrictions on Russian banks that it had previously rebuffed.</p> <p>The double-barreled shift following the Russian invasion of Ukraine — “the turning of an era,” Chancellor Olaf Scholz said — came after years in which German policymakers declared they could separate business from politics, even approving the construction of Nord Stream 2, a gas pipeline linking Germany and Russia, in 2015, the year after the Kremlin annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.</p> <p>Germany's deep economic relationship with Russia is decades old and, many critics say, has led to a foreign policy orthodoxy that long held back Europe from sharper criticism of the Kremlin.</p> <p>But Saturday's move opened up Europe's weapons-packed armories to Ukraine, since Berlin retained a veto power over how German-manufactured armaments were used even after they were sold elsewhere. More broadly, Scholz's decision to swing more directly into confrontation with a country that helped defeat the Nazis, Russia, was a major break for the richest and most-populous nation in the European Union. Berlin's focus on trade rather than security has led it to spend far less on defense than NATO guidelines require.</p> <p>“This might be one of the biggest shifts in German foreign policy since World War II,” said Marcel Dirsus, a German political scientist and fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University, who has often been critical of Germany's hesitant stance in the past. “There has been an awakening, not just by the political class, but also by ordinary voters.”</p> <p>Scholz said he would rush 1,000 antitank weapons and 500 Stinger missiles to Ukraine. German policymakers also agreed to cut off many Russian banks from a key financial transactions mechanism, a step Berlin had been resisting for days. They were also preparing to close their skies to Russian aircraft.</p> <p>“It is our duty to support Ukraine to the best of our ability in defending against Putin's invading army,” Scholz said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Ukraine border guards survived last stand?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/02/26/ukraine-russia-snake-island/
GIST	<p>Ukrainian border guards who insulted Russian forces this week in a recorded exchange that went viral may not have been killed, Ukrainian officials said Saturday, contradicting an earlier claim by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.</p> <p>The State Border Guard Service of Ukraine said in a statement posted to its Facebook page that the guards may be alive, after Russian media reported that they were taken as prisoners from their base on Snake Island in the Black Sea to Sevastopol, a port city that Russia controls on the Crimean Peninsula.</p>

Zelensky cited the guards' story Thursday while highlighting Ukrainian resistance to a Russian invasion, saying that 13 guards had "died heroically." He said he would recognize each with the title Hero of Ukraine.

"May the memory of those who gave their lives for Ukraine live forever," Zelensky said.

The guards' actions drew international attention after an audio recording of their encounter with the Russians was published on the website of the [Ukrainian news outlet Ukrayinska Pravda](#). A Ukrainian official confirmed its authenticity to The Washington Post on Thursday.

In the clip, a Russian voice warns the border guards that they will be attacked if they do not give up.

"I am a Russian warship," a voice from the invaders says. "I ask you to lay down your arms and surrender to avoid bloodshed and unnecessary deaths. Otherwise, you will be bombed."

The Ukrainians responded boldly before they were attacked.

"Russian warship," came the reply, "go f--- yourself."

Ukrainian officials said in the Facebook post Saturday that the border guards were attacked by both Russian aircraft and weapons from the ship, and that Ukrainian officials lost communication with the guards after infrastructure was destroyed. It now appears it was assumed the guards were killed.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Across Ukraine, militias form
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/26/ukraine-russia-militias/
GIST	<p>KHARKIV, Ukraine — In a downtown government office building, men and women in military fatigues carried rocket-propelled grenades through hallways lined with ornate white crown molding. Others had AK-47s with loaded clips slung over the shoulders. Sandbags rested along windows as protection in case of potential blasts. A public bus pulled up to the building. There were hundreds of boxes of bullets inside.</p> <p>This was the scene of the makeshift headquarters of the Ukrainian Territorial Defense Forces in the eastern city of Kharkiv on Saturday morning, right around the time artillery strikes from the Russian military hit the area for a third straight day. Even as the smell of sulfur wafted through the streets, more than 100 people waited in line to join the civilian reserve force.</p> <p>The Ukrainian Territorial Defense Forces, which is believed to have more than 130,000 volunteers, has been conducting weekend training sessions for months in preparation to help defend its turf from Russia. Now that the attack has started, Ukrainians across the country are mobilizing and turning to the Territorial Defense Forces to arm them and send them into the fight. Anyone between 18 and 60 can join.</p> <p>"What's there to be afraid of?" said 19-year-old Yevgeniy Belinkyi, who was waiting to enlist in Kharkiv. "When I'm sitting around, I'm scared. And here there's nothing to fear. Here, I know what's happening, and I hope my loved ones will be all right. I will make sure they are all right."</p> <p>It's the sort of civilian insurgency that Ukraine is counting on to help fend off a Russian military that has significantly more manpower and firepower. President Volodymyr Zelensky tweeted Thursday, "We will give weapons to anyone who wants to defend the country. Be ready to support Ukraine in the squares of our cities."</p> <p>But arming civilians, many of whom have little training, risks exacerbating the violence in cities across Ukraine and potentially giving the Russian military more pretext to fire indiscriminately.</p> <p>In Kyiv, a line stretched down the block at a police station to receive weapons and bullets that officials handed out after brief background checks. Ukrainian Interior Minister Denis Monastyrsky said in a video</p>

message that volunteers in Kyiv alone were given more than 25,000 automatic rifles, about 10 million bullets, and rocket-propelled grenades and launchers.

Nearby, dozens of people huddled in a decades-old underground bunker to assemble molotov cocktails, or petrol bombs, carefully stuffing old wine and champagne bottles with packing material and flammable liquid before delivering them to groups of local defense forces nearby.

Across Kyiv, informal checkpoints and roadblocks have been installed. In some places, piles of tires or sandbags have been tossed in the roads to slow traffic. Messages on the Telegram app suggested citizens should remove road signs, so that Russian tanks might get lost.

The Territorial Defense Forces, now a division of the country's armed forces, has already been praised by Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov for helping hold off the Russian assault on Kyiv since Friday. In the northeastern city of Sumy, 90 miles north of Kharkiv, a civilian defense force seized a Russian armored vehicle and interrogated the soldier in it, according to social media videos verified by The Washington Post.

At the Kharkiv headquarters, a man in camouflage and armed with an assault rifle tried to organize the growing crowd of volunteers. He asked those with military service experience to get in line on the right and everyone else to line up on the left.

He said he worked in an office until the start of the Russian invasion. "I just want to offer free hands," one woman told him. "I can mop the floors." He told her to line up on the left.

Men and women with military experience were ushered inside one group at a time. Many brought their own firearms with them. People edged around each other in the hallway. Some carried water or cartons of food while others carted in boxes of ammunition.

One group of men filed into the bed of a construction truck. The line of those waiting to sign up outside started cheering and wished them luck.

"They're off to the front," said Boris Redin, a democracy activist who uses a blue and yellow tent on the main square of Kharkiv as his headquarters. "Everything that Russia always threatened us with is now happening," he said. "Now we're simply forced to fight back and defend ourselves. But we'll do it with fun and pleasure."

In the western city of Lviv, just 55 miles from the border with Poland and considered one of the safest areas in the country because of its distance from Russia, Oleksii Palyhi, a lanky 22-year-old with a heart tattooed on his cheekbone, had never imagined himself having anything to do with the military.

His experience with weapons was taking potshots at bottles with an air rifle. After he dropped out of his university physics and astronomy course, a lung condition exempted him from compulsory conscription. "I was trying to avoid it," Palyhi said. But now things are different. "We need to defend our motherland."

Nearby, 70-year-old Orest Gaworsky had gathered a group, writing down their names and phone numbers to submit. He was happy with his new comrades.

"There are no losers here," he said of the crowd. In 2015, he served as a civil volunteer in the eastern Ukrainian Donbas region, where the Ukrainian military has been engaged in eight years of conflict with Russian-backed separatists. His vehicle was hit in an explosion there.

"I'm too old to run with a gun, but I can sit and shoot," Gaworsky said. "We will shoot, we will make molotov cocktails, we will do everything," he added. "We'll fight them with pitchforks!"

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/27/us/hurricane-damage-insurance.html
GIST	<p>RACELAND, La.— Almost six months after Hurricane Ida lifted the roof off Brett Gabriel’s house, filling it with rain water, rebuilding feels nearly as out of reach as it did the day of the storm.</p> <p>Between gutting the mold-covered walls and replacing the waterlogged floors in his home about 45 miles southwest of New Orleans, it will cost more than \$150,000 to make the house livable for Mr. Gabriel and his wife, according to an adjuster he hired. But after his insurance company sent its own adjuster to inspect the damage, the company offered just \$21,000 — enough to replace the roof, with \$6,000 left over.</p> <p>The insurance policy “was supposed to be a safety net,” said Mr. Gabriel, who slept in the house for months after the storm, even as he developed a cough and headaches that he blamed on the black mold climbing up the walls. Although the state in January provided them with a travel trailer, they said it’s barely large enough for them to sleep comfortably, and they still spend their days in their damaged home.</p> <p>At the small church a few minutes away where Mr. Gabriel is a pastor, almost everyone in the congregation with homeowners insurance had the same experience, he said.</p> <p>“We could finish each other’s story,” he said.</p> <p>He tries to encourage patience, but his own is wearing thin.</p> <p>“How do you get rest? How do you get some kind of peace?” said Mr. Gabriel, adding, “It’s like we’re stuck in purgatory.”</p> <p>As storms, floods and fires batter homes across the country with heightened intensity, homeowners are increasingly confronting the disaster after the disaster: the fight with insurance companies lasting months or even years for the funds to rebuild.</p> <p>There is little definitive data on whether an increase in extreme weather and natural disasters is leading insurers to find more ways to say no.</p> <p>But residents, legislators and advocates say that the delays and underpayments are becoming more widespread, with insurance companies often sending in inexperienced adjusters and company-appointed engineering firms whose damage estimates are far below the costs needed to make repairs — especially as labor and supply costs have surged.</p> <p>Mike Fesi, a Republican state senator representing the Louisiana district hardest hit by Ida, estimates that roughly half of his insured constituents have experienced delays or underpayment.</p> <p>“I don’t know what the deal is — whether they do that on purpose,” said Mr. Fesi, who himself experienced delays with his insurance claim. “I wouldn’t want to think that that’s the case.”</p> <p>But as insurance companies face near record-breaking losses from back-to-back hurricane seasons as well as disasters like wildfires in the West, some see more than random issues.</p> <p>“What we see there, I see all over the country,” said Doug Quinn, executive director of the American Policyholder Association, a watchdog organization that he said receives regular complaints from both policyholders and industry employees.</p> <p>The organization recently filed a criminal complaint for two homeowners in Florida whose homes were damaged by Hurricane Irma in 2017, alleging denial and underpayment by the United Property & Casualty Insurance Company. The policyholder association said the complaint may represent the experience of thousands of storm victims. The company, which said it had not yet been served with the complaint, declined to comment.</p>

Insurance industry representatives said that companies have paid out enormous sums after disasters in recent years: Insurers are projected to issue over \$20 billion in property loss claims to Louisiana residents affected by hurricanes in 2020 and 2021. With so many payments and such extensive damage, delays are to be expected, said Mark Friedlander, a communications officer with the Insurance Information Institute.

“When there is a catastrophic loss of this magnitude, you’re going to have homeowners that certainly are not happy with the way their claims are being resolved,” he said.

The vast majority of claims are being handled expeditiously, Mr. Friedlander said, citing industry data showing that 83 percent of Hurricane Ida claims had been “closed” by the end of the year.

But that data paints an incomplete picture, according to Jim Donelon, Louisiana’s insurance commissioner, whose office collected and released the data.

“That’s the company’s opinion, that’s not necessarily the policyholder’s opinion,” he said of the term “closed.”

Across south Louisiana, the delays have not only drawn out the rebuilding process — with many storm victims still living in hotels or in trailers in their yards — but have led some people to leave for good.

“That’s what they’re hoping: that you just throw your hands up,” said Lynn Lewis, who has finally begun to rebuild her home in LaPlace, a suburb of New Orleans, after receiving disappointing damage estimates from a string of different insurance adjusters. “A lot of people have just walked away from these homes. It’s going to be a ghost town,” she said.

Kerry Andersen of Lake Charles said she was offered a fraction of what she needed to rebuild from Hurricane Laura in 2020 after nearly a dozen adjusters and engineers hired by her insurance company reviewed the damages. In January, she finally decided to sell her home at a major loss.

“It’s a loss on another whole level because you lose your community as well,” said Ms. Andersen, who has been bouncing between rental apartments in Baton Rouge and New Orleans since the storm.

Mr. Friedlander said most of the issues are with smaller, regional insurers, which he said “do not have the same bandwidth as a major national or super-regional insurer to effectively handle a disaster like Ida.” Three smaller regional carriers have become insolvent in recent months, entering into state receivership.

But advocates said they hear about the same issues from policyholders with companies large and small. More than 450 complaints were made by victims of Hurricane Ida to the Louisiana Department of Insurance against State Farm, the state’s largest insurer.

Roszell Gadson, a spokesman for State Farm, said that the majority of claims for recent storms in Louisiana had been resolved. “We are committed to handling each claim with care and concern, while also honoring the coverage outlined in the insurance policy,” he wrote in an email. For hurricanes in 2020 and 2021, “State Farm has paid over \$2.5 billion dollars on over 140,000 claims received from our Louisiana customers,” he added.

Complaints made against insurers represent likely just a fraction of the number of people experiencing issues, according to Mr. Donelon.

“Most people go into the situation believing that they’re going to get an objective assessment and that they’re going to get what they’re entitled to — and that is the biggest misconception,” said Ted Patestos, an adjuster with Texas-based Smart Claims Public Adjusting, whom Mr. Gabriel hired to assess the damage at his home. “I have yet to see a single insured that wasn’t due more money.”

Most others — who are unaware of public adjusters, or don’t have the time or resources to fight their insurer — just accept their carrier’s offer.

“It’s sort of a war of attrition,” said Mr. Patestos, who said he left his job as an administrator for an adjustment firm hired by insurance companies after Hurricane Laura in August 2020 because he disagreed with the way he and his colleagues were asked to handle cases.

Advocates and experts said that underpayments and delayed payments, while not new, have become more common after Hurricanes Katrina, Ike and Rita caused a slew of damage on the Gulf Coast in 2005 and 2008.

“It became much more sophisticated and much more orchestrated and much more standardized,” said Jeff Raizner, an attorney who has been handling insurance claim litigation for 30 years in Texas and Louisiana. “They’ve been very creative in reacting to increased environmental risk to minimize their own risk.”

Paul Newsome, managing director and senior research analyst at Piper Sandler, an investment bank, said companies are struggling to keep up with the cascading damages.

“Most insurers I don’t think are trying to actually cheat customers,” Mr. Newsome said. “But they’re not trying to be generous either.”

“The underlying business is so unprofitable,” he added, that “they simply can’t afford to be more generous than they’re obligated to.”

And, he said, some policyholders realize only once a disaster hits that the policy they purchased is insufficient. “Who reads the contract right? Nobody does until their loss happens.”

At the same time, many customers are finding adequate coverage hard to afford as insurers facing dwindling profits have raised premiums and deductibles.

The experiences of homeowners after Hurricanes Laura, Delta and Zeta hit southwest Louisiana in 2020 prompted legislators to propose a series of bills in 2021 aimed at keeping insurers’ behavior in check.

But the insurance industry, a powerful presence at the Legislature, fought many of the proposals, and few of those bills passed intact. A proposed penalty of \$10,000 for failure to make a payment within 30 days of receiving a field adjuster’s report was whittled down to \$2,500.

But now, with the same struggles playing out identically in more populated and politically powerful southeast Louisiana, supporters of the legislation hope that they may have more success in the upcoming legislative session. At a committee hearing on insurance in December, lawmakers from both parties expressed mounting frustration and called for reforms.

Although Mr. Donelon, the state insurance commissioner, said Louisiana can be more aggressive in regulating the industry, he also said the state should be cautious to avoid driving insurers out of the market entirely.

“We are charged — every state is charged — with making insurance affordable and available,” said Mr. Donelon, a Republican. “And we can kill the goose that lays the golden eggs in the process of overregulating.”

But others say that the concern about pushing insurers out is misplaced.

“What they’ve put people through — they shouldn’t have their policy if they can’t make them whole in a timely fashion,” said Dustin Granger, who made an unsuccessful run for a State Senate seat in southwest Louisiana last year with insurance reform as one of his main campaign issues. “If you can’t do business right, it’s not really insurance.”

HEADLINE	02/26 Political risk? Putin sidelines advisers
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/europe/putin-ukraine-advisers.html
GIST	<p>Does President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia have the support he needs at home to wage a costly war in Ukraine?</p> <p>That may seem like an odd question. After all, Mr. Putin has already invaded Ukraine, suggesting he feels confident in his resources. And his public image is that of a strongman, with the power to direct the Russian state as he pleases.</p> <p>But no leader can govern alone. And a series of events this week, including Russia's decision to throttle access to Facebook and censor news about the war in Ukraine, raise questions about just how much political support Mr. Putin will be able to draw on during the conflict.</p> <p>An early sign that something might be amiss came on Monday in a televised meeting of Russia's Security Council. Mr. Putin seemed to expect all of the assembled officials to unquestioningly advise him to recognize the independence of Russian-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine — a public show of elite support for war, just days before it began in earnest.</p> <p>But Sergei Naryshkin flubbed his line.</p> <p>Mr. Naryshkin, the director of foreign intelligence, stuttered uncomfortably when Mr. Putin asked him about recognizing the separatists' claims. Then he seemed to overcorrect, saying he thought Russia should recognize the breakaway republics as "part of Russia." Mr. Putin snapped impatiently that Mr. Naryshkin should "speak clearly," then said dismissively that annexation "was not under discussion."</p> <p>The moment seemed so significant because all authoritarian leaders rule by coalition, even if, like Mr. Putin, they often appear to be wielding power on their own.</p> <p>The specifics of the power-sharing coalitions vary by country, with some leaders backed by the military, and others by wealthy business leaders or other elites. But Mr. Putin's coalition is primarily made up of the "siloviki," a group of officials who came to politics after serving in the KGB or other security services, and who now occupy key roles in Russia's intelligence services, military and other ministries.</p> <p>"That's the system that brought him to power, and that's the system that he has relied on in order to consolidate his power," said Maria Popova, a political scientist at McGill University in Canada who studies Russian and Ukrainian politics.</p> <p>For decades, Mr. Putin has proved himself to be highly skilled at maintaining his relationships with elites. And the structure of Mr. Putin's ruling coalition is an advantage for him, said Erica de Bruin, a political scientist at Hamilton College and the author of a recent book on coups.</p> <p>"Where political power is more centralized in an individual ruler — as is the case in Russia under Putin — it can be somewhat harder for elites to hold that leader accountable," she said.</p> <p>But elites still matter. And the Putin advisers' apparent confusion during Monday's meeting, including the exchange with Mr. Naryshkin, gave the impression that Russian president had kept this crucial group out of the loop on his plans.</p> <p>"He seemed to be humiliating some of these people," Dr. Popova said — particularly in the way he spoke to Mr. Naryshkin, a prominent silovik who served in the KGB at the same time as Mr. Putin.</p> <p>Their interaction could have been a fluke brought on by the stress of the moment, of course. And it is notable that all of Mr. Putin's advisers, including Mr. Naryshkin, ultimately offered their public support on Monday for the president's decision to recognize the separatist regions.</p>

But even the seating arrangements of Mr. Putin's recent meetings, in which he has placed himself at a literal distance from his advisers, convey an image that he is separated from everyone, including his elite coalition. It could be because he wanted to avoid catching the coronavirus, reportedly a significant fear for the Russian leader. But some observers, Dr. Popova said, believe Mr. Putin intended to convey the impression that he is the king, and his advisers mere courtiers — a message they might not appreciate.

And then there is the matter of the Russian public. Although public opinion in Russia is not as directly powerful as it would be in a democracy, Mr. Putin's high levels of public support have long been a source of political strength and leverage for him. No other politician or member of his inner circle has a public reputation even close to his.

But public anger over the war could undermine that advantage, and even become a political liability. The war will strain the Russian economy. And it has already been a blow to Mr. Putin's public image as a careful and pragmatic steward of Russian interests.

There was low public support for war in Ukraine even before casualties began to mount. A long-running academic survey found in December that only 8 percent of Russians supported a military conflict against Ukraine, and only 9 percent thought that Russia should arm Ukrainian separatists. That is a very large enthusiasm gap for Mr. Putin to overcome.

Mr. Putin's actions this week suggest he is concerned about the consequences of public anger. On Thursday and Friday, the police arrested hundreds of people who turned out to protest the war in cities across Russia. On Saturday, the government limited access to Facebook and other media sites for the apparent offense of posting stories "in which the operation that is being carried out is called an attack, an invasion or a declaration of war."

Which brings us to the stakes for Mr. Putin in maintaining his relationship with his inner circle: "Because of the resources and access that they have, elites pose the biggest threat to authoritarian leaders," said Dr. de Bruin. "Retaining the support of elites is thus crucial to remaining in power."

And wars often pose a particular threat to leaders' relationships with elites. "The relationship between authoritarian rulers and their core of elite supporters can be strained when dictators wage war abroad — particularly where elites view the conflict as misguided," Dr. de Bruin said.

Public anger over war can also increase elites' perception that a leader is no longer an effective protector of their interests. And if the United States and Europe manage to impose effective sanctions on members of Mr. Putin's elite coalition, that could make the war costly for them as individuals, as well as risky for Russia. (Some members of that inner circle, including Mr. Naryshkin, had already been on the U.S. Treasury blacklist for years, so it is unclear what incremental effect new restrictions might have on their finances.)

That is not to say that Mr. Putin's allies will turn on him because he was rude to one of them on television, of course, or that public anger would immediately undermine his presidency.

But there is still reason to pay attention to signs of strain within Mr. Putin's coalition. Elite dissatisfaction could affect his responsiveness to targeted sanctions, for instance, or the constraints he might face on resources for the conflict in Ukraine. It also could affect whether he has the political capital to stay the course if domestic opposition grows.

And perhaps, if things go very badly, it could mean even more significant consequences for Mr. Putin's presidency.

"Two-thirds of authoritarian leaders are removed by their own allies," Dr. Popova said. "If he tightens the screws too much, if he tries to really increase his power at the expense of the ruling authoritarian coalition, then he is threatening his own position."

HEADLINE	02/27 Deadly flash flooding northeast Australia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/27/world/asia/australia-floods-queensland.html
GIST	<p>MELBOURNE, Australia — At least seven people have died from the flash flooding that has battered northeastern Australia in the past few days, with the wild weather forcing residents to evacuate and schools to close, while thousands of homes have been left inundated.</p> <p>Queensland has been hardest hit, with torrential rain pummeling towns and cities and slowly moving south toward the state’s capital, Brisbane, which was bracing on Sunday for another night of heavy deluges.</p> <p>About 1,400 homes in Brisbane are considered by the authorities to be at risk. Across Queensland, more than 1,000 people have been evacuated and around 34,000 homes were without power over the weekend. Hundreds of schools will be closed on Monday, and officials have asked residents to work from home.</p> <p>Australia has been buffeted by particularly extreme weather over the past few years, including catastrophic fires, drought and widespread flooding.</p> <p>According to experts, the country, a giant landmass as large as the continental United States and surrounded by climate-driving oceans, has suffered weather extremes for millennia, including harsh droughts ending with major floods. But though some of the factors driving those swings are ageless, climate change is increasing the likelihood of severe downpours.</p> <p>Annastacia Palaszczuk, the state premier of Queensland, on Sunday described the latest calamity as a “rain bomb.”</p> <p>“It’s just coming down in buckets,” she said at a news conference. “It’s not a waterfall, it’s like waves of water just coming down.”</p> <p>Ms. Palaszczuk compared the wild weather to an “unpredictable cyclone” and said that the authorities had not expected the storm system to sit over the state for so long.</p> <p>Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia described the situation as “very concerning” and urged residents to stay inside their homes.</p> <p>“It’s going to be a very anxious night in Brisbane as we see the rain continue to fall,” he said on Sunday.</p> <p>Seven people have died since Wednesday, the authorities said, with six in Queensland and one in the state of New South Wales.</p> <p>The latest was a 34-year-old Brisbane man who died trying to escape his submerged car on Sunday morning. Others include a volunteer emergency worker who died when her vehicle was swept away while she was on her way to help a family trapped by the floodwaters.</p> <p>Photographs and videos posted to social media showed houses submerged to their roofs and floodwater touching the tops of traffic lights.</p> <p>Some have taken to using boats, including kayaks, to get around, and footage of one person going swimming in a flooded cricket ground spread quickly on social media, though the authorities have urged residents to stay out of the water.</p> <p>The town of Gympie, where two deaths occurred, saw its worst flooding since 1893.</p> <p>Beaches along the Gold Coast, near Brisbane, and the Sunshine Coast, north of the city — which are iconic vacation locations — were closed on Sunday because of dangerous surf conditions.</p>

	<p>The heaviest rain is forecast to move south in the coming days, to New South Wales, where the authorities are already urging some residents in riskier areas to evacuate.</p> <p>The last time Queensland faced similarly catastrophic flooding was in 2011, when 33 people were killed after torrential rain fell over several weeks. That disaster affected over 200,000 people and caused billions of dollars of damage.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 US, Europe bars some Russia banks SWIFT
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/us/politics/eu-us-swift-russia.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=US%20Politics
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration and key allies announced on Saturday that they would remove some Russian banks from the SWIFT financial messaging system, essentially barring them from international transactions. They also said they would impose new restrictions on Russia’s central bank to prevent it from using its large international reserves to undermine sanctions.</p> <p>The actions, agreed to by the European Commission, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and the United States, represented a significant escalation in the effort to impose severe economic costs on Russia over President Vladimir V. Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine.</p> <p>“Russia’s war represents an assault on fundamental international rules and norms that have prevailed since the Second World War, which we are committed to defending,” the countries said in a joint statement. “We will hold Russia to account and collectively ensure that this war is a strategic failure for Putin.”</p> <p>The announcement was a remarkable change of direction for European powers that, until recent days, were reluctant to end a 30-year effort to integrate Russia into the European economy. Now, like the Biden administration, European nations appear to be headed toward a policy of containment.</p> <p>But, out of a sense of political self-preservation, they stopped short of barring energy transactions with Russia. The result is that Germany, Italy and other European nations will continue purchasing and paying for natural gas that flows through pipelines from Russia — through Ukrainian territory that is suddenly a war zone.</p> <p>Some in Europe, along with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, had called for all Russian institutions and individuals to be cut off from SWIFT in an effort to bring the Russian economy to its knees. About 40 percent of the Russian government’s budget comes from energy sales.</p> <p>While the announcement on Saturday was limited in its scope, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, said that “cutting banks off will stop them from conducting most of their financial transactions worldwide and effectively block Russian exports and imports.”</p> <p>Ms. von der Leyen said the trans-Atlantic coalition would also try to cripple Russia’s central bank by freezing its transactions and making it “impossible for the central bank to liquidate assets.”</p> <p>The targeting of the central bank could, in the end, prove more consequential than the action regarding SWIFT. Russia has spent the last several years bolstering its defenses against sanctions, amassing more than \$630 billion in foreign currency reserves by diverting its oil and gas revenue. Those reserves can be used to prop up the ruble, whose value has fallen dramatically amid the latest rounds of sanctions.</p> <p>Biden administration officials said on Saturday that there would be new restrictions by the United States and its allies against selling rubles to Russia, undercutting the country’s ability to support its currency in the face of new sanctions on its financial sector. That, in turn, could cause inflation — and while administration officials did not say so explicitly, they are clearly hoping that could fuel protests against Mr. Putin’s rule in Russia.</p>

“We know that Russia has been taking steps since 2014 to sanctions-proof its economy, in part through the stockpiling of foreign exchange reserves,” said Emily Kilcrease, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security. “The central bank sanctions will limit their ability to leverage this asset, along with constraining their ability to conduct monetary policy of any sort to manage the economic damage from other sanctions.”

The United States and its allies also announced steps to put pressure on Russia’s elites, including creating a task force that the White House said would “identify, hunt down and freeze the assets of sanctioned Russian companies and oligarchs — their yachts, their mansions and any other ill-gotten gains that we can find and freeze under the law.”

The idea is to strike those who are closest to Mr. Putin and undermine their ability to live in both Russia and the West. In another new move, the United States and its allies said they would seek to limit the sale of so-called golden passports that allow wealthy Russians who are connected to the Russian government to become citizens of Western nations and gain access to their financial systems.

While the steps are some of the harshest taken yet, the announcement falls short of a blanket cutoff of Russia from SWIFT, which some officials see as a nuclear option of sorts. Such a move would have essentially severed Russia from much of the global financial system.

And some experts say that it may only drive Russia to expand the alternative to the SWIFT system that it created several years ago when it began trying to “sanction-proof” its economy. But Russia’s equivalent system is primarily domestic; making it a competitor to SWIFT, officials say, would require teaming up with China.

The moves on Saturday came on the same day that Germany’s chancellor, Olaf Scholz, announced that his government was approving a transfer of antitank weapons to the Ukrainian military, ending his insistence on providing only nonlethal aid, such as helmets.

At the same time, in a post on Twitter, Germany’s foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, and its economy minister, Robert Habeck, acknowledged that the country was moving from opposing a SWIFT ban to favoring a narrowly targeted one.

“We are working intensively on how to limit the collateral damage of a disconnection from #SWIFT so that it hits the right people,” they said. “What we need is a targeted and functional restriction of SWIFT.”

The announcement by the United States and its allies did not specify which banks would be cut off from the system.

SWIFT, a Belgian messaging service formally known as the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, connects more than 11,000 financial institutions around the world. It does not hold or transfer funds, but it lets banks and financial institutions alert one another of transactions about to take place.

For weeks, the Biden administration publicly played down the notion of cutting Russia off from the system, suggesting that while all options were on the table, such a move could create more problems than it would solve.

But behind the scenes, American officials were pressing European allies to give some kind of indication to Mr. Putin that Europe was moving toward greater economic isolation of his country.

Moreover, because SWIFT is a European organization, the United States has been allowing European countries to take the lead on the issue. The only unilateral lever that the United States could use would be to impose sanctions, or threaten them, on the SWIFT organization itself if it continued to transmit messages for Russian institutions.

	<p>Some experts on sanctions have argued that barring Russian financial institutions from SWIFT is overblown as a tool for punishing Russia, saying that strict sanctions on the country's banks will have the same effect.</p> <p>But others have argued that blocking Russian institutions from the system would deal a blow to the country's financial sector and that barring only a handful of banks does not go far enough.</p> <p>"A targeted cutoff would not achieve what is needed," said Marshall S. Billingslea, who was the assistant Treasury secretary for terrorist financing in the Trump administration. "They'll simply reorganize the banking sector to put somebody else forward. The much more straightforward approach is to simply detach SWIFT from all of the Russian financial institutions."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 NKorea launches missile; 8th test of year
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/asia/north-korea-missile-launch.html
GIST	<p>SEOUL — North Korea on Sunday launched a ballistic missile toward the sea off its east coast in its eighth missile test of the year, the South Korean military said.</p> <p>The missile, launched at 7:52 a.m. from Sunan, near Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, flew 186 miles to the east, reaching an altitude of 385 miles, the South's military said. No further details were immediately released, but the data suggested the missile was less powerful than the last one the North launched, four weeks ago.</p> <p>North Korea conducted seven missile tests in January, more than in all of 2021. Until now, it had refrained from weapons tests this month, possibly out of deference to China, its neighbor and only major ally, which was hosting the Beijing Winter Olympics.</p> <p>South Korea called the missile test "deeply worrisome and regrettable" in a statement issued by President Moon Jae-in's office. His office called a meeting of the country's National Security Council after the launch.</p> <p>With the Olympics now over, analysts had expected the North to start testing missiles again, both to advance its weapons technology and to gain diplomatic leverage with the United States, in hopes of eventually securing a reduction of international sanctions over its nuclear weapons program.</p> <p>The latest test comes as the Biden administration is focused on the crisis in Ukraine, and in the midst of a presidential campaign in South Korea. The March 9 election will pit a progressive candidate from Mr. Moon's party against a conservative calling for a tougher stance on North Korea.</p> <p>"With the United States' attention in Ukraine and South Korea in the middle of a change of government, it's a good time for Kim Jong-un to nudge them with a provocation," said Lee Byong-chul, a North Korea expert at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University in Seoul, referring to the North Korean leader.</p> <p>"North Korea will watch how they respond to this test before determining what it will do in its next missile test," Mr. Lee said.</p> <p>The North's previous test — of a Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile, on Jan. 30 — was its boldest launch since November 2017, when it last tested an intercontinental ballistic missile. The Hwasong-12 reached an altitude of 1,242 miles before crashing into the sea, 497 miles east of its launch site.</p> <p>Multiple United Nations resolutions forbid the North to test ballistic missiles.</p> <p>Analysts said North Korea's recent flurry of launches was aimed at putting itself higher on the Biden administration's list of priorities. Since Mr. Biden took office a year ago, his approach to North Korea has</p>

been similar to that of former President Barack Obama: keeping the door open for dialogue, but refusing to offer incentives to bring Mr. Kim to the table.

Since Mr. Kim's direct diplomacy with President Donald J. Trump stalled in 2019, he has ordered his government to build more sophisticated missiles, including ones capable of targeting the United States and its allies in the Asia-Pacific with nuclear warheads.

Mr. Kim says his arsenal is meant for deterrence, but analysts fear that North Korea could also export its missile technology to obtain badly needed hard currency.

"North Korea needs to collect data through more tests before it determines that its missiles are ready for exporting," Mr. Lee said.

The statement from Mr. Moon's office deplored the North's decision to launch a ballistic missile "despite our patience and the joint efforts by us and the United States to find a diplomatic solution," especially "at a time when the whole world was exerting its efforts to resolve the war in Ukraine."

On Saturday, North Korea made what appeared to be its first official comment on the Ukraine war, publishing a statement that blamed it on the United States' "highhandedness and arbitrariness" and "disregard of the legitimate demand of Russia for its security."

"Gone are the days when the U.S. used to reign supreme," Ri Ji-song, a government analyst, said in the statement, which was posted on the website of North Korea's Foreign Ministry.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Calif. governor lifts many Covid orders
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/26/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#gov-newsom-lifts-many-covid-executive-orders-but-not-californias-state-of-emergency
GIST	<p>Gov. Gavin Newsom of California lifted many executive orders related to the pandemic on Friday, as Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations there continue to drop, but he maintained California's state of emergency.</p> <p>Under the governor's action, 19 of the remaining provisions will be terminated immediately, with an additional 18 to be lifted at the end of March and 15 to expire at the end of June.</p> <p>The state has dropped numerous executive orders since last summer. With the latest rollbacks, just 5 percent of the state's pandemic-related executive orders will remain in place, including those that maintain the state's testing and vaccination programs and that protect hospital and health center capacity, such as by allowing for expanded telehealth services. Other remaining provisions maintain some Covid workplace safety standards.</p> <p>"As we move the state's recovery forward, we'll continue to focus on scaling back provisions while maintaining essential testing, vaccination and health care system supports that ensure California has the needed tools and flexibility to strategically adapt our response for what lies ahead," Mr. Newsom said in a statement.</p> <p>The order does not lift California's state of emergency despite recent calls to do so by Republican legislators. In a resolution to end the state of emergency that senators will debate in a hearing next month, legislators wrote that "an open-ended state of emergency, with boundless powers vested in a chief executive, is incompatible with democratic government."</p> <p>In a plan for the state's next phase of its Covid-19 response released this month, the governor's office defended the ongoing state of emergency.</p>

	“As we saw with the Omicron surge that is only now subsiding, Covid-19 is still very much with us,” the plan stated, adding that the state of emergency had enabled authorities to expand vaccination efforts, improve the capacity of the health care system and get millions of tests and personal protective equipment to students and other residents.
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HEADLINE	02/26 SKorea faces deadliest day of pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/26/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#south-korea-records-its-deadliest-day-of-the-pandemic
GIST	<p>South Korea faced its deadliest day yet of the pandemic on Saturday, reporting 112 deaths in a 24-hour period, as the nation battles a coronavirus surge fueled by the Omicron variant. Health authorities reported that there were 643 patients hospitalized in severe or critical condition on Saturday, up from 408 patients a week earlier.</p> <p>The surge in South Korea, currently one of the worst in the world, intensified over the last week, reaching a record of 171,452 cases in a single day on Wednesday. Since then, case numbers have remained at a high level, with the government reporting 166,207 cases on Saturday. South Korea, a nation of about 50 million people, is now reporting more cases each day than the United States, a once unimaginable development.</p> <p>Despite having 86 percent of its people fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data, South Korea has recorded a 201 percent increase in the average of daily cases over the past two weeks.</p> <p>According to a senior health official, Lee Ki-il, who spoke at a briefing on Friday, the government has plans to secure additional hospital beds in March. He added that the government and the medical community were doing their best to “provide no inconveniences to the public.” Mr. Lee said that the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency was prepared to take in and treat up to 2,000 patients with severe cases of Covid-19.</p> <p>The government has responded to the surge by focusing on the detection of the virus in high-risk groups — those in their 60s and older, as well as people with pre-existing medical conditions — and treating only the most critical cases. The majority of people who test positive are being asked to simply look after themselves at home.</p> <p>That is part of the government’s new approach of learning to live with the virus. Starting in March, those who live with people who have tested positive will no longer be required to quarantine, regardless of their vaccination status. Previously, unvaccinated people were required to quarantine for seven days if someone in their household tested positive.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Critics call for boycott of Russian vodka
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/europe/russian-vodka-brands-boycott.html
GIST	<p>Vodka, a drink that was popularized in the West by James Bond and that has long been one of Russia’s most visible exports, is now the target of international anger over the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>In New Hampshire, where liquor and wine are sold through state-run stores, Gov. Chris Sununu, a Republican, announced on Saturday the removal of “Russian-made and Russian-branded spirits from our liquor and wine outlets until further notice.” In Ohio, where the state contracts with private businesses to sell liquor, Gov. Mike DeWine, also a Republican, announced a halt to state purchases and sales of Russian Standard Vodka.</p> <p>L. Louise Lucas, a top Democrat in the Virginia State Senate, is calling for “the removal of all Russian vodka and any other Russian products” from Virginia’s nearly 400 state-run Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority stores.</p>

And Senator Tom Cotton, Republican of Arkansas, [wrote on Twitter](#), “Dump all the Russian vodka and, alongside ammo and missiles, send the empty bottles to Ukraine to use for Molotov cocktails.”

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario, Canada’s most populated province, [announced](#) on Friday that it would remove “all products produced in Russia” from its more than 600 stores. Similar removals were underway in the provinces of Manitoba and Newfoundland, Reuters [reported](#).

Boycotts of highly visible imports during times of conflict are nothing new.

In 2003, for example, France’s opposition to the United States-led military action in Iraq led some American politicians to [boycott](#) French wine and try to rename French fries as “[freedom fries](#)” (even though the dish probably [originated in Belgium](#)).

And just as in earlier efforts, boycotting Russian vodka may be more symbolic than strategic.

Vodka has [a long history](#) in Russian culture, with The Times once [describing](#) it as “an inseparable part of Russian social life.” Colorless and odorless, it can be combined with countless types of mixers to make a wide array of concoctions. That versatility helped it take hold in the United States market, leading to a fierce competition among vodka makers from various countries.

But while 76.9 million nine-liter cases of vodka were sold in the United States in 2020 — generating nearly \$7 billion in revenue for distillers, [according](#) to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, an industry trade group — Russia’s share of the market isn’t as large as popular imagination may suggest.

Russia accounted for a little more than 1 percent of the dollar amount of vodka imported into the U.S. in 2017, [Thrillist reported](#), citing data from the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States.

France — whose vodkas include Grey Goose, Cîroc, Gallant and MontBlanc — accounted for about 39 percent of total vodka import value, the most of any country, Thrillist reported. Sweden, with vodkas like Absolut and DQ, accounted for about 18 percent. The other top importers were the Netherlands (17 percent), Latvia (10 percent), Britain (5 percent) and Poland (5 percent).

In Pennsylvania, [The Philadelphia Inquirer reported](#) on Saturday, “true Russian brands are hard to find.”

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HEADLINE	02/27 Iran: enrichment even after nuclear deal
SOURCE	https://www.israelhayom.com/2022/02/27/iran-says-will-enrich-uranium-to-20-even-after-nuclear-deal/
GIST	<p>Iran will continue to enrich uranium to 20% purity even after sanctions on it are lifted and a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers is revived, Iranian news agencies quoted the country's nuclear chief as saying on Friday.</p> <p>"[Uranium] enrichment ... continues with a maximum ceiling of 60%, which led Westerners to rush to negotiations, and it will continue with the lifting of sanctions by both 20% and 5%," the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Mohammad Eslami, was quoted by the semi-official news agency Fars as saying.</p> <p>The 2015 deal restricts the purity to which Iran can enrich uranium to 3.67%, far below the roughly 90% that is weapons-grade or the 20% Iran reached before the deal. Iran is now enriching to various levels, the highest being around 60%.</p> <p>Eslami did not elaborate or explain how 20% enrichment would be acceptable under the 2015 nuclear deal which Iran has been trying to revive through indirect talks with the United States.</p> <p>Iranian officials had previously told Reuters that Iran had agreed to suspend its 20% and 60% enrichment if an agreement is reached in the Vienna talks to salvage the 2015 pact.</p>

Separately, a senior Iranian cleric said earlier that ending Iran's economic isolation by lifting banking and oil trade sanctions was Tehran's most important demand in talks with world powers in the Austrian capital Vienna.

Iran on Wednesday urged the West to be "realistic" in the talks, as its top negotiator returned to Tehran for what might be final consultations ahead of a possible accord following months of indirect talks with the United States.

"Our negotiators... do their best to ensure the nation's interests, and know that the final point is the lifting of all sanctions, especially on banking and trade," Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said at Friday prayers in Tehran.

"If these sanctions are not lifted, it is as if there were no talks," state media quoted him as saying.

The general content of sermons delivered at Friday prayers is set by the office of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say on Iran's nuclear policy and all other matters of state.

After 10 months of talks in Vienna, progress has been made toward the restoration of the pact to curb Tehran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, but both Tehran and Washington have cautioned that still there are some significant differences to overcome.

A majority of Iran's hard-line parliament demanded in a letter last week that the United States should guarantee that they would not abandon a restored agreement. The assembly has not voted on the letter.

A senior Iranian official told Reuters that Iran has shown flexibility by agreeing to "inherent guarantees" that the US administration will not quit an agreement, as Washington says it is impossible for President Joe Biden to provide the legal assurances Iran has demanded.

Iran insists on the immediate removal of all sanctions imposed under former US President Donald Trump in a verifiable process, including those imposed under terrorism or human rights measures.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Officials prep: radiological event scenario
SOURCE	https://www.opb.org/article/2022/02/26/washington-oregon-state-officials-prep-up-for-worst-case-radiological-event-scenario/
GIST	<p>Here are the worrisome scenarios – a radioactive release from Ukraine’s damaged Chernobyl waste site, which Russian troops now occupy. Or a worse scenario, a nuclear bomb.</p> <p>LiveScience reports there are already higher levels of radioactive activity in Ukraine around Chernobyl, possibly from the soil being disturbed in the exclusion zone.</p> <p>Officials in Oregon and Washington are at a heightened level of readiness. Their task would be to detect it, understand what it is and where it came from and tell the public how to respond.</p> <p>Oregon Emergency Management officials say they’re prepping for a range of potential impacts of what they are calling “the Ukraine/Russia crisis.” That includes anything from cyber terrorism to a radiological event.</p> <p>Mark Henry leads Washington state’s Radiological Emergency Preparedness and Response team. He lists some of the items that have been assembled by his team for a possible event:</p> <p>“... radioactive contamination survey instrumentation, air samplers,” he says, “when I’m talking supplies, I’m talking smears for actually taking deposition samples, I’m talking containers for milk samples or water samples ...”</p>

Henry says he works with about 75 people at Washington's Department of Health who specialize in radiological problems.

There are a surprising number of events already in the state, he says. Henry says it can include anything from a radium dial watch breaking, incidents at Hanford, fire hazmat teams that find material in people's houses or even a breach of radioactive material in a medical facility – like at Harborview in Seattle in 2019.

Henry says he's worked hard to make sure his team is ready for many types of possible incidents for decades. Over the decades, supplies, procedures and protocols have improved. But sometimes resources could still be overrun.

"There is only so far you can go," Henry says. "There is only so much money, there's only so much time and there's only so many people. I feel like we are adequately prepared for some type of nuclear event that would happen – over in the Ukraine."

But he noted that should an incident happen in Washington or Oregon it would be hard to ever prepare enough.

Henry and his colleagues are currently coordinating with the: U.S. Department of Energy, Pacific Northwest National Lab, National Guard and Washington's emergency management teams.

Henry says in any event, the focus would be: "What is the risk from the radioactive isotopes that we're seeing to our citizens?"

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HEADLINE	02/25 Airlines mask mandate remains for now
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/02/25/mask-mandate-transportation-airlines/
GIST	<p>A federal mask mandate for airline passengers and transit riders will stay in place for at least three more weeks, despite steps Friday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ease mask guidance in other settings across the country.</p> <p>A Transportation Security Administration order enforcing the mandate expires on March 18, and it could be extended. The rules, imposed in the early days of the Biden administration, require mask-wearing across all forms of public transportation, including transit stations, on airplanes and at airports.</p> <p>"The mask requirement remains in place and we will continue to assess the duration of the requirement in consultation with CDC," TSA spokeswoman Alexa Lopez said Friday.</p> <p>The CDC's revised approach and decisions by local and state officials to drop mandates could leave transportation as one of the few remaining settings in which people are required to wear masks.</p> <p>The transportation mandate has fueled a rash of conflict on airplanes and in airports, with the Federal Aviation Administration logging record numbers of complaints about unruly passengers. The agency says the vast majority of reports have been mask-related.</p> <p>The FAA has proposed more than \$1 million in fines for badly behaved passengers and the TSA has issued another \$400,000 in penalties.</p> <p>The guidance the CDC issued Friday takes a new approach to measuring the risks that communities face from the virus, focused on the strain faced by medical systems. The shift means that only about 28 percent of the population lives in areas where the agency recommends universal mask-wearing, while previously almost everyone did.</p> <p>The CDC also said it now only recommends masks in schools in communities with high levels of disease.</p>

HEADLINE	02/26 Calif. 'Freedom Convoy' scraps plan
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/us/trucker-convoy-protest.html
GIST	<p>A caravan of truckers that left California for Washington, D.C., on Friday to protest coronavirus mandates arrived in Las Vegas early Saturday with only five trucks in its ranks, the organizers said, prompting them to scrap the convoy and direct members to merge with other anti-mandate groups heading to the capital.</p> <p>The caravan, named Freedom Convoy USA 2022, was one of several in the United States, modeled after the Canadian protests, that drove off this week toward Washington to demand, among other things, an end to the pandemic national emergency that began in March 2020, and an end to government rules requiring masks and vaccinations.</p> <p>According to its Facebook page, the Freedom Convoy's route started in Los Angeles on Friday and was scheduled to make stops in Salt Lake City, Denver and other major cities before arriving in Washington on March 1 in time for President Biden's State of the Union address. But it appeared that the group couldn't hold on to its supporters for long.</p> <p>"There are two other convoys that have massive turnouts, and are in progress to the D.C. area as we speak," the organizers wrote on Facebook early Saturday, referring to two groups called the People's Convoy and the Texas Convoy.</p> <p>"We are making the decision to send any truckers planned to meet at our routes to start heading to D.C. for the event on the National Mall, or to join the convoys named above as they are about to merge into one," the organizers wrote.</p> <p>The decision drew mixed reactions.</p> <p>"I spent days trying to coordinate a rally in support of our truckers. I have three tiny kids and work a full-time job and stretched myself thin then made myself look so stupid. I'm pretty hurt by all this," one person commented on the post.</p> <p>"I think all of the convoys merging together will have a much bigger impact than several smaller convoys. The bigger, the better," a second person wrote.</p> <p>Yet another convoy left on Wednesday from Adelanto, Calif., roughly 80 miles northeast of Los Angeles. About 40 truckers rolled out, and a rally that resembled a Make America Great Again event drew about a hundred more vehicles.</p> <p>Many of those behind the demonstration appeared to be aligned with far-right organizations and activists, and some had connections to the Jan. 6 Capitol attack.</p> <p>Brian Brase, a convoy spokesman and truck driver based in Ohio, said the motorcade was expected to grow as the trucks wended across the country. "We believe tens of thousands will join in," he said.</p> <p>The Pentagon has approved the deployment of 700 unarmed National Guard troops to Washington, D.C., to prepare for the convoys and assist with traffic control during any demonstrations, The Associated Press reported.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Ukrainians hold public gatherings, rallies
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/ukraine/ukrainians-western-washington-russia-invasion-help-aid/281-d7df35e7-d9a8-4171-8b7f-f3a6735f4c14
GIST	SEATTLE — For thousands of Ukrainians living in the U.S., it's difficult to watch the Russian invasion of their home country unfold.

From prayer services to protests Ukrainians in western Washington hosted several public gatherings to rally support.

Hundreds rallied in the shadow of Seattle's Space Needle on Saturday. The event included playing the Ukrainian national anthem and a speech from Congressman Rick Larson.

Earlier in the day, hundreds filled a Tacoma church for a prayer service. They talked about refugees and said they hope to welcome some here.

Valeriy Golodorodao is the honorary consul of Ukraine in Seattle and said more than 70,000 people are living in western Washington with Ukrainian heritage.

"I had over 100 phone calls, what can we do? How can we coordinate, how can we support Ukraine?" Golodorodao said.

Vitaliy Piekhotin was born in Ukraine and still works with a charity there. He just returned from visiting family two weeks ago.

"It's a very difficult time for Ukraine we never were thinking in our minds in my bad dreams I would never imagine that this would happen," Piekhotin said.

He said his family members are hiding in dark bomb shelters but love their country and want to see it go on. He carried around a Ukrainian flag that had been damaged when Russian troops first invaded eastern Ukraine eight years ago. He believes it is a symbol for his country.

"Ukraine will survive. This flag survived 8 years and Ukraine survived the occupation of different periods. It will survive Putin, it will survive from Russia," Piekhotin said.

"We as Ukrainians, we do it because of love, not because of hate towards Russia because of love towards Ukraine," Golodorodao said.

It is that love that they say brings them out to protest, to pray or anything else they can for their loved ones and land under attack so far away.

Local Ukrainian leaders say they're meeting with members of Congress to try and work diplomatic channels, as well.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Recall: Festive Lights Hanukah menorahs
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/trending/recall-alert-fire-hazard-prompts-recall-nearly-8000-menorahs-sold-nationwide/RCZWPLOJNVDF5H6IKCKSWQIXCA/
GIST	<p>FRAMINGHAM, Mass. — The TJX Companies Inc. on Wednesday recalled about 7,900 Festive Lights Hanukah menorahs because they pose a fire hazard while holding lit candles.</p> <p>The recall affects resin and medium-density fiberboard menorahs with inserts for nine candles that were sold in the following shapes: llama, brontosaurus, stegosaurus, T-rex, castle, rainbow, rainbow platform and emojis.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the affected style numbers, which are printed on the label on the bottom of the menorahs, are as follows: 262933, 263407, 263417, 262950, 856166, 856168, 856179, 856182, 856189, 856192, 856262 and 856266.</p> <p>The menorahs were sold at Marshalls, HomeGoods and Homesense stores nationwide from November 2021 through January 2022 for between \$8 and \$15, the company stated.</p>

	<p>To date, Framingham, Massachusetts-based TJX has fielded three reports in the United States of the menorahs catching fire when holding lit candles, but no injuries or property damage has been reported.</p> <p>Consumers are advised to immediately stop using the recalled menorahs and return them to any Marshalls, HomeGoods or Homesense stores for their choice of either a full refund or a refund in the form of a store gift card.</p> <p>Consumers can also contact TJX for instructions to submit photographic proof of appropriate disposal to receive either a full refund or refund in the form of a store gift card.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Public transit: the new drug den
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/public-transit-new-drug-den-whats-being-done-keep-you-safe/X6GLQLCLXZGOXOH655KPJ23RJM/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — Lurking inside countless King County Metro Transit buses and trains is growing frustration over dangerous fumes from America’s deadliest drug.</p> <p>According to several Metro Transit drivers and the union representing thousands more, blue counterfeit M-30 oxycodone pills — commonly laced with fentanyl — are openly smoked or “freebased” by riders aboard buses and trains, exposing riders and operators to fumes often described as “sickening.”</p> <p>“Every morning it’s the same thing,” said Feanette Black Bear, who said she has relied on Metro Transit for her daily commute to work at 4:30 a.m. Black Bear said on almost every trip, she winces at the sharp odor of fentanyl smoke, which she said makes her sick. “You can see them doing it, then you smell it.” She said she wears two masks, hoping to protect herself from the fumes.</p> <p>The fentanyl pills, commonly known as “blues” or “30s” on the street, are now so plentiful and cheap, police say they’ve commonly replaced the street markets of even heroin and methamphetamine. Users typically roast the blue pills into smoke and vapor on tin foil with a torch, and inhale it with a straw. KIRO-7 crews saw users often quickly slumping into a zombielike state of short-term unconsciousness after inhaling the fentanyl vapors.</p> <p>“It’s all day, every day,” said daily Metro Transit commuter Tyrone Thomas.</p> <p>Frequent rider Tyler Miller agreed. “It’s (happening) on every other bus I’d say, to be honest with you.”</p> <p>KIRO-7 News crews boarded Metro buses and often found the effects of fentanyl use hard to miss, with some users seen unconscious. From bus stops, users could be seen smoking the pills with passengers sitting and standing nearby.</p> <p>“It’s getting to where I’m afraid to go to work anymore,” said a veteran Metro Transit bus driver, who asked KIRO-7 not to identify him because he said drivers could be reprimanded or fired for speaking to media. The driver said he has been taken out of service in the middle of a route by a supervisor after feeling impaired by fentanyl fumes.</p> <p>“They (fentanyl users) do this without any regard to who else is on the bus,” he said. “The most disturbing cases I’ve seen are people doing it right behind unsuspecting families with children,” adding that many passengers can’t identify what the smell is — described as burning peanut butter mixed with drain cleaner — or what it may be doing to them.</p> <p>“Operators ... say, ‘I’m getting sick,’” said Cory Rigrup, Vice President of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587, which represents King County Metro Transit drivers. “They say, ‘I’m getting headaches, I’m getting dizzy.’ I stop the bus, I pull over and let people off because they’re experiencing the same thing. They want off the bus.”</p>

The pills are smoked in the open on the streets of Seattle, even while police are nearby. After the 2021 State V. Blake decision by the Washington State Supreme Court, simple possession of drugs, including fentanyl, has been decriminalized; but fentanyl overdoses have become the leading cause of death for American adults ages 18 to 45. King County has seen an increase of 650% in fentanyl overdose deaths over the past five years.

Metro drivers posted video on social media platforms showing them trying to get smokers' attention or to stop, but drivers tell KIRO-7 fentanyl smokers are very rarely deterred, even when they know they're being recorded.

"It's insane. It's out of control," said Rigtrup, who noted that the issue of fentanyl fumes didn't seem to be an issue eight months ago. He said hundreds of buses and light rail trains became littered with scorched foil, darkened with fentanyl residue.

"Somewhere along the way, someone said it's cool to smoke drugs on the bus," Rigtrup said. "No one's going to stop you, and that's where we are today."

Drivers say users have told them smoking fentanyl outside in moving air scatters the fragile fumes. "What's been explained to me is that it's desirable to smoke the drugs on the bus," Rigtrup said. That's the ideal place."

"This is a passionate topic for me. I want my riders back, folks," said Erik Christensen, a Metro driver for 22 years who recently begged members of the King County Council to understand the urgency.

"You see the picture in my background," asked Christensen, while testifying in a public forum via Zoom. "That's not a random picture. That's from one trip on the train," he said. They sat back there, and each one of those pieces of foil represents somebody using fentanyl on one trip. This happens daily on our buses — daily."

"We could have a driver collapse," said the unidentified driver. "There's all sorts of scenarios that I worry about, with a driver who may be high on fentanyl."

Metro Transit drivers have told KIRO-7 and the ATU that police will not typically intervene or remove someone smoking fentanyl on public transit. "I've had King County Sheriff Deputies within feet of the individual smoking, and said they couldn't do anything," said the driver.

A new pilot program just introduced by Metro bolsters the number of unarmed transit security guards. The Safety, Security, and Fare Enforcement (SaFE) Reform Initiative includes a plan to hire dozens of guards.

In a written statement to KIRO-7, King County Metro Transit noted there is supposed to be enforcement of laws regarding smoking and drug use. "We work on keeping our passengers and operators safe and Metro has existing policies in place: smoking and drug use continue to be a violation of Metro's Code of Conduct," read a statement from King County Metro spokesman Jeff Switzer. "Our policies also say that passengers could be requested to disembark from the coach or transit facility (shelters, transit centers, and Park and Rides) and subject to a criminal citation."

Switzer said the "standard procedure" for unarmed transit safety officers is to make verbal contact, and try to gain compliance peacefully and respectfully from the a rider who is violating the Code of Conduct, "in an effort to keep the coach moving and to get other riders to their destination without delays.

"If the person does not comply, the Transit Security Officers (TSOs) will request the rider to disembark the coach at the next stop. Switzer said if a rider refuses to leave, additional steps can be taken, but "Transit Security Officers have not been authorized to physically remove anyone from the coach unless the person poses an imminent safety risk to other riders or the officers." Switzer added, "New Transit Security

Officers receive standard training which includes guidance for interaction with people who are engaged in illegal activity, including smoking drugs on buses and at transit locations.”

“You could put 200 security guards out there, it would not help the problem of smoking fentanyl on the buses because it’s too widespread,” said the unidentified driver, who added that his fellow drivers are often advised to take their bus out of service if a drug using rider is unconscious, or refuses to leave. “They would leave the person on until they decided they were ready to leave,” he said.

“The only option (supervisors) have given me was to go ‘sick on the road,’ to shut the bus down, tell everybody to get off and end service for that route.

The driver said he tried writing letters to several state lawmakers, detailing problems and the lack of authority to stop it, and asking legislators for a specific law to ban smoking opioids on public transit.

“I think it needs to be a serious crime to smoke these drugs on public transportation,” he said.

Drivers say without security help, they are their own last line of defense.

“My only option is to stop the bus and ask somebody in the throes of drug addiction, ‘Please stop doing that?’ It doesn’t work. We need a show of force on these buses,” said Christensen.

“There needs to be some enforcement of the rules,” said Rigtrup. “Metro has a policy saying I can’t eat potato chips on the bus; but smoking fentanyl is OK? Someone needs to enforce the rules of conduct.”

Feanette Black Bear told KIRO-7 she extends an open invitation to anyone in charge, “from Seattle’s mayor, to the county executive, to the governor” to join her on board the bus she takes to work.

“Ride the bus and see for himself what’s going on,” she said.

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HEADLINE	02/25 Homeless camp near Seattle city hall
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/we-lead-with-compassion-mayor-harrell-faces-pressure-on-homeless-camp-near-city-hall
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — KOMO News continues to ask Seattle city leaders about removal of a homeless encampment right next to City Hall.</p> <p>The camp removal started Sunday and crews worked while activists were in the area. Then, the city stopped cleanup.</p> <p>Since then, fires have happened at the encampments.</p> <p>Seattle Police said authorities had to pull someone away from their tent and away from the flames.</p> <p>KOMO spoke to Mayor Bruce Harrell at an event in the city Friday. We repeatedly asked Harrell about the encampment. Initially and at that moment, the mayor did not want to answer questions from reporter Paul Rivera on camera about the encampment and its removal, but he eventually said this in a recorded interview:</p> <p>"We have a narrative in this city that we will effectuate effective public safety which means not racializing, or militarizing it, but making sure that we make it safe for people," Harrell said. "We're trying to aggressively house people. Right now, it's very cold and so my primary concern is making sure people can come out of the cold. We lead with compassion ok and quick fixes are sometimes not sustainable. So what we have is a sustainable plan, leading with compassion and at the same time garnering resources through our regional homelessness authority. We just raised ten million dollars and are raising more to make sure everyone is housed. My statement to everyone that's listening is: trust the process; because we</p>

are aggressively trying to make sure people are housed and people are warm and that is our strategy and you'll see our actual written plan here very shortly, but that's our action. That's what we do."

KOMO also reached out Friday to several Seattle City Councilmembers.

"I want to see these people be able to be brought inside and we know that by creating a 'by name list' and a needs assessment, combined with the shelter availability, gets people inside," said Dan Strauss, District 6 Councilmember.

"The Executive considers obstructions and immediate hazards as part of prioritizing their encampment mitigation efforts," said Lisa Herbold, District 1 Councilmember. "I have regular meetings with Chief Scoggins where we have discussed the increase of fires at encampment locations. The trend is concerning, but also not unexpected as people attempt to stay warm during colder weather. I'm glad to hear that no injuries were reported and that SFD is conducting an investigation into the cause of the fires."

"I ran on public safety and revitalizing downtown, and these fires are at the intersection of both," said Sara Nelson, Citywide Councilmember. "We've heard clearly that our neighbors, both housed and unhoused, have been frustrated with previous efforts to address these issues, and I'm placing my trust in the mayor and the KCRHA (King County Regional Homelessness Authority) to work on encampments, and get this right in a way that is safe, caring, and effective."

Currently there is no timetable set for the removal of the homeless encampments near city hall.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Worry: rising Seattle homeless camp fires
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/officials-worry-over-rising-homeless-encampment-fires-in-seattle
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Officials say fires are breaking out in homeless encampments around Seattle, and they are becoming more numerous.</p> <p>New numbers from the Seattle Fire Department show these encampment fires continue to grow. On Thursday, another fire broke out at an encampment across the street from City Hall.</p> <p>This comes as Mayor Bruce Harrell vows to clean up camps and provide stable housing.</p> <p>The Fire Department says crews have been busier than ever. Their data shows that, in 2020, they put out 854 encampment fires, then 1,446 in 2021.</p> <p>In 2022 so far, they have already extinguished 266 fires.</p> <p>FOX 13 News spoke with the neighbors of a man whose tent went up in flames Thursday, to figure out what went wrong.</p> <p>"If I had to guess, nodding off when you have hand sanitizer burning," explained Michael, an encampment resident.</p> <p>"Then I heard the cop saying 'Get out, get out, man, your tent is going to burn down,'" another resident told FOX 13, who wished to remain anonymous. "I didn't want to leave my tent because I had all my stuff in my tent... It's all I have, so I kind of was, um, I ended up getting out because of the heat."</p> <p>We reached out to the Mayor's Office, who said that campsite is still on the calendar – but things came to a pause due to the freezing overnight temperatures.</p> <p>"Nobody chooses this situation," the anonymous resident said. "I'm just trying to make it day by day."</p> <p>Right now, they say their priority is getting people out of the cold.</p>

	There is no word when the sweeps will start again.
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HEADLINE	02/26 Russia official issues stark threats to West
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russian-official-issues-stark-threats-west-83126363
GIST	<p>MOSCOW -- Moscow may respond to Western sanctions by opting out of the last nuclear arms deal with the U.S., cutting diplomatic ties with Western nations and freezing their assets, a senior Russian official warned Saturday as Russia's ties with the West dived to new lows over its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, also warned that Moscow could restore the death penalty after Russia was removed from Europe's top rights group — a chilling statement that shocked human rights activists in a country that hasn't had capital punishment for a quarter-century.</p> <p>The sanctions placed new tight restrictions on Russian financial operations, imposed a draconian ban on technology exports to Russia and froze the assets of Putin and his foreign minister, a harsh response that dwarfed earlier Western restrictions. Washington and its allies say that even tougher sanctions are possible, including kicking Russia out of SWIFT, the dominant system for global financial transactions.</p> <p>In sarcastic comments posted on a Russian social platform, Medvedev dismissed the sanctions as a show of Western “political impotence” that will only consolidate the Russian leadership and foment anti-Western feelings.</p> <p>“We are being driven out of everywhere, punished and threatened, but we don't feel scared,” he said, mocking the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its allies as an attempt to vindicate their past “shameful decisions, like a cowardly retreat from Afghanistan.”</p> <p>Medvedev was placeholder president in 2008-2012 when Putin had to shift into the prime minister’s seat because of term limits. He then let Putin reclaim the presidency and served as his prime minister for eight years.</p> <p>During his tenure as president, Medvedev was widely seen as more liberal compared with Putin, but on Saturday he made a series of threats that even the most hawkish Kremlin figures haven't mentioned to date.</p> <p>Medvedev noted that the sanctions offer the Kremlin a pretext to completely review its ties with the West, suggesting that Russia could opt out of the New START nuclear arms control treaty that limits the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals.</p> <p>The treaty, which Medvedev signed in 2010 with then-U.S. President Barack Obama, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers, and envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance. The pact, the last remaining U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control agreement, had been set to expire in February 2021 but Moscow and Washington extended it for another five years.</p> <p>If Russia opts out of the agreement now, it will remove any checks on U.S. and Russian nuclear forces and raise new threats to global security.</p> <p>Medvedev also raised the prospect of cutting diplomatic ties with Western countries, charging that “there is no particular need in maintaining diplomatic relations” and adding that “we may look at each other in binoculars and gunsights.”</p> <p>Referring to Western threats to freeze the assets of Russian companies and individuals, Medvedev warned that Moscow wouldn't hesitate to do the same.</p>

“We would need to respond in kind by freezing the assets of foreigners and foreign companies in Russia ... and possibly by nationalizing the assets of those who come from unfriendly jurisdictions,” he said. “The most interesting things are only starting now.”

Commenting on the Council of Europe's move Friday to suspend Russia's representation in Europe's leading human rights organization, Medvedev contemptuously described it as one of “useless nursing homes” that Russia mistakenly joined.

He added that it offers “a good opportunity” to restore the death penalty for grave crimes, noting that the United States and China have never stopped using it.

Moscow has maintained a moratorium on capital punishment since August 1996 as part of the obligations it accepted when it joined the Council of Europe. Medvedev's statement terrified Russia's human rights activists who warned that the prospect of reinstatement of the death penalty is particularly ominous in Russia because of its flawed judicial system.

Eva Merkacheva, a member of the Kremlin human rights council, deplored it as a “catastrophe” and a “return to the Middle Ages.”

“Given the very low quality of criminal investigation, any person could be convicted and executed,” she said. “To say that I'm horrified is to say nothing.”

The Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered a series of anti-war protests in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities across Russia, which were quickly dispersed by police who arrested hundreds.

As part of efforts to stifle dissenting voices, Russia's state communications watchdog issued notices to top independent media outlets, warning that they will face closure if they continue to distribute information about the fighting that deviates from the official line.

On Friday, the watchdog also announced “partial restrictions” on access to Facebook in response to the platform limiting the accounts of several Kremlin-backed media. It did not say what exactly its restrictions implied.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Finland, Sweden brush off Russia warning
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/finland-sweden-brush-off-moscows-warning-joining-nato-83126927
GIST	<p>HELSINKI -- Finland and Sweden have brushed off warnings from neighboring Russia that their possible joining of NATO would trigger “serious military-political consequences” from Moscow for the two countries.</p> <p>A statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry Friday voiced concern about what it described as efforts by the United States and some of its allies to “drag” Finland and Sweden into NATO and warned that Moscow would be forced to take retaliatory measures if they join the alliance.</p> <p>Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said Saturday that “we’ve heard this before.”</p> <p>“We don’t think that it calls for a military threat,” Haavisto said in an interview with the Finnish public broadcaster YLE. “Should Finland be NATO’s external border, it rather means that Russia would certainly take that into account in its own defense planning. I don’t see anything new as such” in the statement delivered by Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Haavisto said.</p> <p>Finland has a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) land border with Russia — the longest border shared by any European Union member state and Russia.</p>

Haavisto's words were echoed by the Finnish President Sauli Niinisto who said on Friday that he didn't see the statement meaning Moscow was threatening Finland militarily but rather what kind of "countersteps" Russia would take should Finland join NATO.

Niinisto told Finnish media that he didn't see Zakharova's statement being any different from what she and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov have said before on Finland's possible membership in NATO. He also noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the issue with a similar tone already in 2016 during his Finland visit.

In Sweden, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson addressed Moscow's statement in a joint news conference Friday with Sweden's military commander Micael Byden.

"I want to be extremely clear. It is Sweden that itself and independently decides on our security policy line," Andersson said.

Russia's statement came as Moscow's relations with the West sank to the lowest point since the Cold War over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"It's obvious that if Finland and Sweden join NATO, which is first of all a military organization, it will entail serious military-political consequences, which would require retaliatory steps by the Russian Federation," Zakharova said at a news briefing Friday.

Zakharova argued that while every state has a sovereign right to choose ways of ensuring its security, all members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe confirmed their adherence to the principle that the security of one state shouldn't be achieved to the detriment of another country's security.

"We view Finland's course for maintaining the policy of military non-alignment as an important factor contributing to stability and security in northern Europe and on the European continent as a whole," Zakharova said, adding that "we can't fail to see consistent efforts by NATO and some of its members, primarily the U.S., to drag Finland as well as Sweden into the alliance." She noted an increase of NATO drills on their territories.

Though not members, Finland and Sweden closely cooperate with NATO, allowing, among other things, the alliance's troops to exercise on their soil. Helsinki and Stockholm have also substantially intensified their bilateral defense cooperation in the past years, and secured close military cooperation with the United States, Britain and neighboring NATO member Norway.

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HEADLINE	02/26 'Stand your ground' laws; homicides rise
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/stand-ground-laws-connected-higher-homicide-rates/story?id=83050286
GIST	<p>"Stand your ground laws," have proliferated around the country after they were first introduced in Florida in 2005, with proponents contending that they've kept neighborhoods safer.</p> <p>A study released this week, however, has found that those laws, which give gun holders the right to use their weapon in public in self-defense are actually associated with an increase in firearms homicides.</p> <p>The peer-reviewed report issued by the JAMA Network Open found that the monthly gun homicide rate rose 8-11% in 23 states after they enacted the laws, amounting to roughly 58 to 72 additional homicides a month in these locations.</p> <p>The increase in homicides was greatest in southern states that first passed the legislation -- Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Missouri -- ranging from 16.2% to 33.5% after the laws were passed according to the study.</p>

"There was no evidence that [stand your ground] laws were associated with decreases in homicide or firearm homicide," the report said. But the report did find that some states, including Arizona and Texas, did not have any significant increases in homicides after the laws were passed.

Researchers did not provide any conclusion as to why the "stand your ground" laws were associated with the rise in killings. The report cautioned that "stand your ground" laws alone may not be sufficient to explain the increase and said other factors, such as other firearms laws, had to be considered.

A gun control advocate who has been analyzing shooting data contended the laws have motivated some to act like vigilantes.

Sarah Burd-Sharps, director of research for the non-profit group Everytown for Gun Safety, told ABC News the laws have emboldened some gun owners to shoot first and ask questions later, because they think they are criminally immune during a conflict.

"We've seen it time and time again. They encourage people to continue aggression even in situations where violence is avoidable," she told ABC News.

The report looked at public health data on deaths from 41 states, 23 of which enacted "stand your ground" laws between Jan. 1, 2000, and Dec. 31, 2016. The data showed that during that period there were 129,831 firearm homicides in the "stand your ground" states while there were 40,828 recorded in the other states.

States that passed "stand your ground" laws saw their monthly gun homicide rates jump from 0.36 per 100,000 to 0.39 after the laws were enacted, the study said. In the states that didn't have "stand your ground" laws, the firearm homicide rate was 0.19 per 100,000 people, according to the data.

The report found that the monthly firearm homicide rate grew from 1.03 per 100,000 to 1.12 per 100,000 for victims who were minorities in "stand your ground" states after the laws were enacted. By comparison, the monthly gun homicide rate for white victims remained level at 0.2 per 100,000 people after the laws were enacted in those states, the report said.

The study's authors were not immediately available for comment.

Burd-Sharps said some gun owners have used "stand your ground" to justify their biases against minorities or certain communities. She cited the shootings of Trayvon Martin and Ahmaud Arbery, both of whom were unarmed Black men who were shot by perpetrators claiming they were breaking the law, as examples.

Martin was shot in Florida 10 years ago while Arbery was shot in Georgia two years ago. Both states have "stand your ground" laws and there is no duty by a gun holder to retreat.

"'Stand your ground' laws allow people to shoot people who they perceive a threat," Burd-Sharps said.

Some lawmakers have contended that "stand your ground" laws supplement existing self-defense laws and provide law-abiding gun owners with an option in dire circumstances, such as a mugging.

"In these situations, you don't always have time to decide if you could safely retreat or not," said Arkansas state Rep. Aaron Pilkington, when presenting a bill that passed last year that would allow an armed person to use deadly force if they believe they are in imminent danger.

Burd-Sharps said that most Americans don't realize that traditional self-defense laws are pretty comprehensive and have prevented unnecessary shootings for years.

"[Self-defense law] includes the use of deadly force but that is only as a last resort. You have the right to walk away," she said. "When you teach kids how to respond in times of conflict, one of the things you teach is how to walk away. That's critical for adults as well."

	<p>Following the report's release, Everytown announced Thursday that it created a task force of state and federal leaders who are looking to repeal and modify existing stand your ground laws. The task force, which has 20 members from 19 states, will also work to prevent the passage of bills that mimic current "shoot first," laws, according to Everytown's founder Shannon Watts.</p> <p>"We must reframe the debate," she said during a news conference Thursday.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 China shared US Ukraine intel with Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/25/china-shared-us-intelligence-ukraine-crisis-russia/
GIST	<p>China's government took U.S. intelligence provided to convince Beijing to join American-led efforts to head off a military attack on Ukraine and shared it with Russia, according to a person familiar with the activity.</p> <p>Intelligence-sharing with a major U.S. adversary is unusual but was part of repeated diplomatic efforts by the Biden administration to gain support from China in dissuading Russian President Vladimir Putin from invading Ukraine.</p> <p>However, the Chinese government repeatedly rebuffed the efforts and instead turned over the intelligence data to Moscow, an indication of the growing ties between Beijing and Moscow.</p> <p>The information-sharing began in a diplomatic exchange in December 2021 warning China that Russia was preparing an attack on Ukraine.</p> <p>"Our information indicates that China then relayed that information to Russia, noting that the U.S. was attempting to sow division between China and Russia and that China would not try to dissuade Russia from invading," said the person.</p> <p>The exchanges continued up until Wednesday, when Russian military forces launched strikes throughout Ukraine.</p> <p>The intelligence-sharing, first reported by The New York Times, involved details of large-scale Russian troop movements near Ukraine's border that would later be used in the military operation to take over Ukraine that began this week</p> <p>Beijing officials, reflecting the growing anti-U.S. posture of the Chinese Communist Party, several times dismissed the U.S. intelligence and appeals to pressure Moscow against invading.</p> <p>The betrayal by Beijing of the U.S. diplomatic outreach was reflected in President Biden's terse response to a reporter's question on Thursday when asked if the United States is urging China to help isolate Russia.</p> <p>"I'm not prepared to comment on that at the moment," Mr. Biden said.</p> <p>A State Department spokesman decline to comment on the failed diplomatic outreach.</p> <p>Chinese Embassy spokesman Liu Pengyu said China bases its views of the Ukraine conflict "on its merits" and was in touch with both Washington and Moscow trying to avert a war.</p> <p>"For some time, China communicated with relative parties, including Russia and the U.S., and has actively promoted the political settlement process of the Ukraine issue," Mr. Liu said.</p> <p>Mr. Liu noted recent calls between Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin, as well as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, European foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, and Emmanuel Bonne, a security advisor to French President Emmanuel Macron.</p>

“All these phone calls focused] on exchanging views on the situation in Ukraine,” he said.

A White House National Security Council spokesperson said the administration has been clear in exchanges with China that it seeks to work together on issues of mutual concerns.

“Over the last several months we have briefed a range of nations on our strong concerns around Russia’s military buildup around Ukraine, and the impact that an invasion could have on regional and global security. That includes the PRC,” she said.

The spokesperson declined to provide details of the diplomatic exchanges.

“As President Biden has said, now is the time for the leaders of the world to speak out clearly against President Putin’s flagrant aggression, and to stand with the people of Ukraine,” she stated.

The world is watching to see which nations will support basic principles of freedom, self-determination and sovereignty or are tacitly supporting Moscow’s war, the spokeswoman said.

“Nations that side with Vladimir Putin will inevitably find themselves on the wrong side of history,” she said.

Additionally, the economic sanctions imposed on Russia and backed by U.S. allies are designed to limit the negative effects on those nations.

“Nations that try to evade or work around these measures will experience the consequences of those actions,” the spokesperson said, in a veiled reference to China.

Retired Navy Capt. James Fanell, former director of intelligence for the Pacific Fleet, said among China Hands in Washington there is a misguided belief that sharing intelligence with Beijing will prompt reciprocal actions that benefit U.S. national security.

“This foolish supposition has led to the sharing of sensitive information to the Chinese Communist Party officials while simultaneously refusing to share much lower levels of operationally relevant information with our allies,” Capt. Fanell said. “This mythical belief by these so-called experts has not only proved to be untrue, but has also severely compromised American intelligence sources and methods.”

Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke by phone with Mr. Putin on Friday and urged him to negotiate with Ukraine, Chinese state media reported.

“China supports Russia and Ukraine to resolve issues through negotiations,” Mr. Xi reportedly told the Russian leader, a broadcast on China Central Television said.

Mr. Putin informed Mr. Xi that “Russia is willing to conduct high-level talks with Ukraine,” CCTV said.

The exchange followed comments by Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying on Thursday accusing the United States of stoking the conflict in Ukraine by supplying arms to the Ukrainian military.

The United States has supplied an estimated \$360 million in arms to bolster Ukraine’s defenses in recent months, including Javelin anti-tank missiles, small arms and other weapons.

China has made clear it is unofficially siding with Russia in the conflict by not condemning the military aggressions, despite a declared policy of respecting foreign nations’ sovereignty and not interfering in their internal affairs.

Ms. Hua also accused the United States of inciting the conflict by claiming the Russian invasion would take place Feb. 16, what she called a deliberate “false alarm” to incite a conflict.

“Those who follow the U.S.’s lead in fanning up flames and then shifting the blame onto others are truly irresponsible,” Ms. Hua said. “As the culprit, the person who started the fire should think about how to put out the fire as soon as possible.”

China has refused to characterize the Russian military operation as an invasion.

Earlier this month, China and Russia issued a joint statement signed by Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin pledging closer cooperation.

“China is willing to work with all parties in the international community to advocate a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept, and firmly safeguard the international system with the United Nations at its core,” Mr. Xi said during the call with Mr. Putin.

Mr. Xi also thanked the Russian leader for traveling to Beijing to attend the Winter Olympics that concluded days before the Ukraine invasion.

The western economic sanctions on Russia are expected to drive Mr. Putin closer into the Chinese orbit.

China announced Friday that it is loosening controls on imports of wheat from Russia, a move that could alleviate some sanctions pressure on Mr. Putin.

The administration’s diplomatic effort to win Chinese support began after Mr. Biden and Mr. Xi held a virtual summit Nov. 15.

Following the meeting, U.S. officials said the most pressing problem for the United States and China could address is the Russian buildup near Ukraine, The New York Times reported.

That prompted White House officials to hold a one and half hour meeting with China’s ambassador to the United States, Qin Gang. The officials provided him with U.S. intelligence suggesting Russian armored units appeared to be surrounding Ukraine in preparation for an attack.

China was also told that sanctions on Russia for an invasion would impact China because of its commercial ties with Russia.

In all, four meetings with the Chinese at the embassy in Washington and on the phone. One meeting included Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

In the session, the Chinese ambassador voiced skepticism and noted Russia’s “legitimate security concerns” regarding Ukraine.

Late last week, Mr. Blinken called China’s Mr. and urged him to help preserve Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity — among the Chinese Communist Party’s declared five principles of foreign policy.

The most recent diplomatic appeal was made to Mr. Qin in Washington on Wednesday and were told the same Chinese talking points shortly before the war in Ukraine began.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Experts: invasion to ratchet up food prices
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/26/ukraine-russia-wheat-exports/
GIST	Russia’s invasion of Ukraine could push U.S. food prices even higher, as the region is one of the world’s largest producers of wheat and some vegetable oils. And the disruptions could drag on for months or even years, as crop production in the area could be halted and take a long time to restart.

This new inflation shock comes at a time when global markets remain extremely strained because of pandemic-related disruptions. The price changes impacted commodity prices in recent days and could flow through to higher costs at grocery stores and restaurants soon.

Grocery manufacturers are concerned that, while the vast majority of ingredients and materials for American products are sourced domestically, the economic effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine will be global, according to Katie Denis, vice president of communications and research for the industry organization Consumer Brands Association.

"We're already seeing energy prices rise and commodities futures for wheat and corn spike. That's going to prompt concern when costs to make and ship goods continue to set records and consumer demand continues to be above levels not seen since March 2020," she said. "There is no slack in the system, making weathering disruption significantly more difficult."

American Bakers Association President Robb MacKie said consumers will start seeing rising prices in anything that has grain in it — wheat, corn, oats, barley, rye — because the grain markets "are all tied to each other." That could mean higher prices on breads, beer, cereal and animal feed, among other things, impacting billions of dollars worth of products.

"In a situation where the whole supply chain is already stressed, if [the conflict] goes on more than a couple weeks, you will start to see an impact in food prices," he predicted.

Key food commodity prices hit their highest point in nearly a decade on Friday. The Chicago Board of Trade March wheat contract, the global benchmark, rose to its highest point since 2012, with corn and soybean prices also soaring.

There are a number of factors pushing the prices up so quickly. Russia's attack has imperiled shipping in the Black Sea region, which is where much of the area's wheat shipments are exported. And the Russian attacks could disrupt the ability of Ukrainian farmers to plant and harvest crops in 2022.

This week's events "are proof that this will be a multiyear issue," said Michael Swanson, Wells Fargo's chief agricultural economist. "It's my assumption that Ukrainian crops won't get planted, or not anywhere near what they typically plant. And the Russian crops will be planted but will be embargoed in many markets. This is not something that will be resolved in weeks or months."

Ukraine is the world's fourth-largest exporter of both corn and wheat. It is also the world's largest exporter of sunflower seed oil, an important component of the world's vegetable oil supply. Together, Russia and Ukraine supply 29 percent of all wheat exports and 75 percent of global exports of sunflower oil, said Kelly Goughary, senior research analyst Gro-Intelligence, an agriculture data platform.

Black Sea sunflower oil futures are up 11 percent so far this year — amid a worldwide shortage of vegetable oils. Goughary said a loss of Ukrainian and Russian sunflower oil will drive up the prices for soybean oil, palm oil and other vegetable oils, at a time when the U.S. is pushing to use vegetable oils in cleaner-burning biofuels.

"There will be a disruption; there is already a blockade on Black Sea ports," she said. "In the near term this should have an impact on European Union wheat shipments, then it will have an impact on the U.S."

Russia is a key global player in natural gas, a major input to fertilizer production. Higher gas prices, and supply cuts, will further drive fertilizer prices higher. Russia is one of the biggest exporters of the three major groups of fertilizers (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium). Physical supply cuts could further inflate fertilizer prices.

Because of the relationship between energy and agricultural prices, the conflict will impact agriculture and food supplies across the globe and contribute to farmers' decisions about what, and how much, to grow.

“This is headed for a supply crunch that will be hard to resolve,” said Todd Hultman, lead grain market analyst for agricultural data service DTN. Corn is an especially fertilizer-intensive crop. Higher fertilizer prices mean that American corn farmers, who largely grow the crop to feed animals, will have a hard time being profitable.

“This year with those new high fertilizer prices I’m looking at an additional cost of \$200 per acre for growing corn,” he said. “In 2021 it was roughly \$700 to grow an acre, this year a ballpark is \$900 per acre. This will be additional cost for the row crop farmers as well as the ranchers, feed lots and dairy farmers.”

Those higher costs will, in turn, be passed along to restaurants, retailers and, ultimately, consumers.

Hultman said higher animal feed costs also have the potential impact of pinching the beef and pork supply, at a time when demand remains high and supply has already dropped because of issues like drought last summer, an increase in viral pig diseases like porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome, and even the bottlenecks at meat-processing facilities at the beginning of the pandemic that left some cattle and pig farmers without a place to have their animals slaughtered. The bottleneck caused the big meat companies to pay less per animal to ranchers, which in turn caused many of them to shrink their herds.

A chief concern for many economists right now is that a lengthy conflict between Russia and Ukraine would serve to change trade flows, said Kyle Holland, a pricing analyst covering oil seeds and grains at Mintec, which analyzes food commodity price data.

“If you can’t buy from Ukraine and Russia, where do you turn to for supply? We don’t really know the answer,” he said. “If Russia blocks the ports and there are sanctions on Russia’s most commonly exported goods, it could, for instance, create a situation where Russian wheat is unimportable. Then where do people expect to import from? The fears are being stoked and we’re stabbing in the dark a little bit because of the speed at which this has happened.”

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HEADLINE	02/26 Russia targets 3 cities; fierce resistance
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/europe/russia-ukraine-invasion-kyiv-kharkiv-kherson.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian military, outmanned and outgunned, waged ferocious, close-range battles on Saturday to maintain control of the capital, Kyiv, and other cities around the country as intense street fighting broke out on the third day of the Russian invasion.</p> <p>A day after Ukrainian soldiers sought to forestall an attack on the capital by blowing up bridges and setting up armed checkpoints, bursts of gunfire and explosions could be heard across Kyiv, including in its heart, Maidan square, where Ukrainian protests led to the toppling of a pro-Moscow government in 2014.</p> <p>Russian forces on Saturday were focused on three cities: Kyiv in the north, Kharkiv in the northeast and Kherson in the south.</p> <p>Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelensky, said in a video on Saturday that the military, aided by civilians armed with rifles and firebombs, had “withstood and successfully repelled enemy attacks” throughout the country.</p> <p>“The fighting continues in many cities and districts of our state, but we know what we are protecting: the country, the land, the future of our children,” he said. “Kyiv and key cities around the capital are controlled by our army. The occupiers wanted to block the center of our state and put their puppets here, as in Donetsk. We broke their plan.”</p> <p>As both sides tried to shape perceptions of how the fighting was going, the Kremlin said Saturday afternoon that the Russian assault on Kyiv was continuing “in accordance with the plan of operation,” as a spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, put it.</p>

Mr. Peskov said the campaign had been paused to allow the Ukrainian government to consider peace negotiations, but New York Times reporters in Kyiv heard sustained shelling throughout Friday night. On Saturday morning, a missile struck a civilian apartment block on the southwestern edge of Kyiv, injuring at least six people, according to Ukraine's emergency services.

A senior Pentagon official said Saturday that most of the more than 150,000 Russian soldiers who massed on the Ukrainian border in the weeks ahead of the attack were now fighting in the country, but were "increasingly frustrated by their lack of momentum" in the face of stiff Ukrainian resistance, especially in the north.

Despite their combat power, Russian troops do not yet control any cities, the official said, although they were closing in on Kyiv and other major urban centers. Nor do Russian warplanes fully control Ukraine's airspace, as Ukrainian fighter jets and air defenses continued to engage them.

Still, the Russian attack from air, land and sea is fast-moving and extremely fluid, and most Western analysts expect the Ukrainian forces to succumb to the larger and more technologically advanced Russian military in the coming days.

The Pentagon's assessment was echoed by the [British Ministry of Defense](#), which said the speed of the Russian advance had "temporarily slowed, likely as a result of acute logistical difficulties and strong Ukrainian resistance." It said that the overnight clashes in Kyiv probably involved "limited numbers of pre-positioned Russian sabotage groups" and that Russia's ultimate aim was to capture the capital.

The Ukrainian health minister, Viktor Lyashko, said Saturday that 198 people, among them three children, had been killed since the start of the Russian incursion on Thursday. Another 1,115 people, including 33 children, have been wounded, he said.

As tens of thousands of refugees fled the country, the United States and its European allies scrambled to fortify Ukraine's forces by sending missiles, medical equipment and helmets.

Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, declared a curfew starting at 5 p.m. Saturday until 8 a.m. Monday, and warned that any civilians on the street during that period "will be considered members of the enemy's sabotage and reconnaissance groups."

At the site of a predawn fight with Russian vehicles and possibly infantry, which had been waged along a central thoroughfare, Victory Prospect, Ukrainian soldiers were digging trenches on Saturday.

Mayor Klitschko said that service had been suspended on the subway system, where the stations will serve as round-the-clock shelters. In Kyiv and across Ukraine, people huddled in bomb shelters, lined up at bank machines and stocked up on essentials amid the wail of air raid sirens.

In the port city of Odessa, on the Black Sea, a missile hit a Japanese cargo ship called the Namura Queen late Friday, injuring a crew member and damaging the vessel, the ship's owner said. The shipping company, Nissen Kaiun, said the vessel had docked in Odessa to load grain and would now head to Turkey.

As Ukraine struggled to hold off the Russian military, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said on Saturday that the United States had authorized another \$350 million to support Ukraine's defense, bringing the total amount of security assistance that the United States has committed to Ukraine over the past year to more than \$1 billion. The package will include "further lethal defensive assistance to help Ukraine address the armored, airborne and other threats it is now facing," Mr. Blinken said in a statement.

The Netherlands said that it would provide 200 Stinger air defense systems. Greece said it would provide thousands of protective medical masks, gloves and suits, as well as defibrillators and portable breathing machines.

And in a turnaround, Germany, which had earlier angered Ukraine by limiting its aid offer to helmets and protective vests, announced Saturday night that it would send 1,000 RPGs and 500 “Stinger” air-to-ground rockets to Ukraine. Germany also permitted the Dutch to donate 400 German-made RPGs.

There was also growing support to ban Russia from SWIFT, the international banking system that connects more than 11,000 financial institutions around the world. The request by Ukraine has been backed by Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Britain, France, Hungary and Italy.

Emergency plans to ensure the safety of the Ukrainian president remained a subject of intense discussion among officials on Saturday. The Ukraine Embassy in London posted on its Twitter account a statement that Mr. Zelensky had said in response to what the embassy called “the U.S. evacuation offer”: “The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride,” Mr. Zelensky said.

As the fighting raged, several nations continued their overtures to Russia and Ukraine to engage in negotiations, but with no tangible signs of progress. Turkey was pursuing a cease-fire as soon as possible to prevent further loss of life and damage to Ukraine, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey told Mr. Zelensky in a phone call on Saturday, according to Mr. Erdogan’s office.

Turkey’s foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, also called for an end to Russia’s “military operations” in a phone call with his Russian counterpart, Sergey V. Lavrov, on Saturday, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said.

The Biden administration said Friday that Russia had never been serious about finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis, and that weeks of back and forth between Washington and Moscow had been little more than a sham as the Kremlin prepared for war.

“Moscow engaged in the pretense of diplomacy,” the State Department spokesman, Ned Price, said at a news conference. “It now appears quite clear that Russia was not, and has not been, interested in genuine diplomacy.”

For Europe, the fighting has created a growing humanitarian crisis, with at least 100,000 Ukrainians entering Poland since Thursday, the Polish government said, and thousands more crossing into Romania and Moldova to escape the forces ripping apart their country.

Ukrainians poured into eastern Poland on Friday, with mothers carrying babies and leading children by the hand across a border crossing at Korczowa, where they were welcomed by Polish volunteers offering food and diapers.

Natalia Khukar, 32, who arrived with her two sons, Maxim, 8, and Oleh, 5, cursed Russia’s president, Vladimir V. Putin, as she waited by the roadside for a relative to collect the family.

“I have no words to describe what Putin is doing,” she said, tears welling in her eyes. “A normal person would never do what Putin has done. He must have gone mad.”

Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuca of Romania said that at least 19,000 people from Ukraine had entered his country since the fighting began. About 11,000 have remained in Romania and 40 have applied for asylum, he said.

“I would not have expected to experience such situations again,” Mr. Ciuca, a retired general, said in a statement. He denounced the suffering of “people who are plagued by the horrors of a war.”

While thousands have fled the country, others with little or no military training have taken up arms distributed by the Ukrainian government in a frantic bid to bolster the military. Mr. Zelensky’s government handed out 70,000 AK-47 rifles to citizens on Thursday alone, one aide said, and radio stations were broadcasting instructions for how to make Molotov cocktails.

Return to Top	<p>Arsan, 35, the owner of a coffee shop in Lviv, Ukraine, was among those who volunteered.</p> <p>Only three days ago, he was going to the gym and getting ready for work when his wife told him the country was at war. On Saturday morning, he was learning to make firebombs and to spot fluorescent missile targets on buildings placed there by the Russians, and joining a brigade of citizens getting ready to fight.</p> <p>“We can learn to shoot, because we don’t know how this situation will develop,” he said.</p> <p>Asked whether Ukrainian soldiers could hold off the Russian attack on Kyiv, Arsan said that every night was terrible but that he believed they would prevail. “The Ukrainian army is doing a great job,” he said. “They are super people.”</p> <p>In Russia, where street protests have been met with force and arrests by the police, Moscow escalated its crackdown on free speech. But hackers found a way to break through. Six government websites were down, according to Ukraine’s state telecommunications agency, and Russian TV viewers suddenly found themselves listening to Ukrainian songs.</p> <p>The Kremlin’s communications regulator slowed down access to Facebook and warned 10 Russian independent news outlets that their websites could be blocked. Their offense: publishing articles “in which the operation that is being carried out is called an attack, an invasion or a declaration of war.”</p> <p>In response, Facebook and Twitter blocked Russian state media from running ads on their platforms.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Putin faces sanctions; assets an enigma
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/europe/putin-sanctions-money-assets.html
GIST	<p>When Western governments announced on Friday their intention to freeze assets belonging to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia as punishment for invading Ukraine, there was no indication they knew of significant holdings that could be tied to him.</p> <p>In fact, very little is known about what Mr. Putin owns and where it could be. Despite years of speculation and rumor, the extent of his wealth remains maddeningly opaque, even as billions of dollars have sluiced through the accounts of his close friends and luxury properties have been connected to family members.</p> <p>Officially, Mr. Putin earns about \$140,000 a year and owns a small apartment, according to his public financial disclosures.</p> <p>But that would not account for “Putin’s Palace,” a vast estate on the Black Sea estimated to have cost more than \$1 billion, with a Byzantine ownership history that does not include the Russian president but has been linked to his government in various ways. Nor would the disclosures account for “Putin’s Yacht,” a \$100 million luxury vessel long tied to him in speculative news reports. (The yacht, Graceful, was tracked leaving Germany for Russia just weeks before the invasion of Ukraine.)</p> <p>There is also the \$4.1 million apartment in Monaco, purchased through an offshore company by a woman reported to be Mr. Putin’s lover. And there is the expensive villa in the South of France linked to his ex-wife.</p> <p>The problem for the United States and its allies is that none of these assets can be directly connected to the Russian president.</p> <p>Until now, Western governments have focused their sanctions on people suspected of serving as Mr. Putin’s proxies, hoping it will increase pressure on him. And most of the new penalties, like those that followed the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, continue to be aimed at oligarchs close to Mr. Putin. These include Kirill Shamalov, his former son-in-law and a major shareholder in a Russian petrochemical firm; Boris Rotenberg, a construction magnate; and Gennady Timchenko, an investor said to be Russia’s sixth-richest person.</p>

The sanctions would make it impossible for those targeted to access assets or conduct financial transactions in the United States, Britain and the European Union, where the penalties were announced this past week. They would essentially freeze in place money and property that could be traced to those on the list, putting cash and securities, or even the sale of real estate, out of reach.

But Russia's elites, who have lived under Western sanctions for most of the last decade, have long favored complex mazes of corporate ownership to avoid scrutiny. Oftentimes, their wheeling and dealing only surfaces publicly with the [leak of files](#) from offshore law firms or secretive banks that cater to those wanting to hide their wealth.

Paul Massaro, a senior adviser at the U.S. Helsinki Commission who has been counseling members of Congress on Russia sanctions, said it was not always clear to American officials what assets would be affected.

"It means that the sanctions that we hit these people with are largely going to be glorified press releases, because without knowing what these assets are, we can't freeze them," he said.

Still, even if the United States has only a limited picture of Mr. Putin's wealth, sanctions are worthwhile "just to freeze what we can, freeze what we know, and let people know that these people aren't welcome in our system," Mr. Massaro said.

One European diplomat emphasized the symbolic value of the effort, describing it as ["a politically important signal."](#)

By being added to the U.S. Treasury Department's "Specially Designated Nationals" list, Mr. Putin joins a small but notorious subgroup of heads of state, including Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, Kim Jong-un of North Korea and Bashar al-Assad of Syria. Sergey V. Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, was also subject to the sanctions.

"We are united with our international allies and partners to ensure Russia pays a severe economic and diplomatic price for its further invasion of Ukraine," Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen said in a [statement](#) on Friday.

Estimates of what Mr. Putin may secretly be worth vary widely. One of the most sensational claims came from Bill Browder, an American-born financier who was banned from Russia in 2005 after clashing with oligarchs there. He [testified before Congress](#) in 2017 that he believed Mr. Putin's wealth could total \$200 billion, an extraordinary sum that would have made him the richest man in the world at the time.

Anders Aslund, an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and the author of the 2019 book "Russia's Crony Capitalism," pegged the Russian president's wealth at about \$125 billion. He argued that much of it could be hidden in a web of offshore havens held by Mr. Putin's allies, friends and relatives.

On rare occasions, people near Mr. Putin's inner circle have spoken publicly about his wealth. In 2010, Sergei Kolesnikov, who said he was a business associate of a Putin ally, wrote an [open letter](#) to Russia's then president, Dmitri Medvedev, asserting that Mr. Putin was building an enormous estate on the Black Sea coast that would come to be known as Putin's Palace. It had cost more than \$1 billion gathered through "corruption, bribery and theft," Mr. Kolesnikov wrote in his letter, which he sent after leaving Russia.

The huge project features a movie theater, a hookah lounge and a pole-dancing stage, according to a report and documentary released last year by the jailed opposition leader [Aleksei A. Navalny](#) and his associates. Several oligarchs close to Mr. Putin have been involved at various times, including Mr. Shamalov's father. Last year, the billionaire Arkady Rotenberg, a childhood friend of the Russian president, [stepped forward](#) to claim that he owned the property and was developing it into a hotel and apartments.

	<p>The Kremlin insists that Mr. Putin is a man of simple tastes, regularly distributing images of him roughing it in the Siberian woods, and denies that he owns any palaces.</p> <p>“Putin has no need for luxury,” the state television host Dmitri Kiselyov said on his show early last year, after Mr. Navalny’s video investigation into the estate.</p> <p>Leaks of financial information have also offered tantalizing clues about Mr. Putin’s proximity to riches, even if he does not appear in the data himself. The Panama Papers, a trove of files from an offshore law firm that were exposed in 2016, revealed the secret wealth of many close to him, including Sergei Roldugin, a cellist and longtime friend who took in more than \$8 million a year, according to documents submitted to a Swiss bank. (He had previously told The New York Times, “I don’t have millions.”)</p> <p>Last year, a new leak of files from companies specializing in offshore tax shelters, called the Pandora Papers, showed that the woman said to be Mr. Putin’s lover had acquired the apartment in Monaco. It was one of a number of assets she had accumulated that were worth an estimated \$100 million.</p> <p>But ultimately, said Nate Sibley, a researcher at the Hudson Institute’s Kleptocracy Initiative, Mr. Putin does not need to own a vast fortune because he is an autocrat who “controls everything.”</p> <p>“When people say he’s worth such and such, what does that mean?” he asked. “Are they really saying that he’s going to cash in and retire to St. Tropez?”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 New Amazon HQ sparks Indigenous feud
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/africa/south-africa-amazon.html
GIST	<p>CAPE TOWN — On a swath of grassy land with an open view of Cape Town’s picturesque Table Mountain, a squad of yellow tractors cleared the lot for a new \$300 million commercial and residential development that has stirred up debate in South Africa not just for its location, but also for its anchor tenant: the tech giant Amazon.</p> <p>The 37-acre site, at the confluence of two rivers, is widely believed to lie in the area where Indigenous South Africans first fought colonial invaders, and some Indigenous leaders consider the development a desecration of sacred land.</p> <p>“A concrete block for an Amazon headquarters on this terrain is egregious and obscene,” said Tauriq Jenkins, who leads about two dozen Indigenous groups opposed to the development.</p> <p>But not all Indigenous leaders are on the same page. When Chief Zenzile Khoisan looks at the construction, he sees a victory for his people: The developer has agreed to build, in plain view of Amazon’s offices, a heritage center telling the story of what are known by some as the country’s First Nations people.</p> <p>Big corporations have “screwed over the First Nations,” said Mr. Khoisan, his slight frame buffeted by the wind in the clearing. “So maybe Amazon’s going to receive a bit of an education.”</p> <p>Leaders of Indigenous groups in South Africa are now locked in a vicious internecine fight over the future of a patch of land that lies in “one of the single most historically significant sites in the country,” in the words of the agency charged with protecting heritage sites in Western Cape Province.</p> <p>The battle, which is also playing out in court, has been marked by insults, accusations of selling out, and deeper debates about who can claim authentic Indigenous heritage and speak for the community. South Africa’s Indigenous communities were decimated over the centuries through genocide and the racist apartheid policy — so it is now often unclear who has the authority to speak for Indigenous people.</p> <p>The River Club development, named after a golf club formerly on the site, has also caused a split within the government. Some politicians have rallied behind the project — the city hailed Amazon choosing Cape</p>

Town as “a base of operations on the African continent” as an economic boon. But officials with local environmental and heritage agencies have raised objections.

A judge in the Western Cape High Court is expected to issue a ruling soon on a petition filed by opponents, who argue that construction should be stopped because the development does not comply with heritage laws.

Critics also see a repeat of a familiar cycle: Wealthy, and mostly white, interests get their way, while marginalized communities are left bickering among themselves. A provincial heritage tribunal criticized government leaders for employing “the politics of ‘divide and rule.’”

Determining Indigenous identity is difficult in South Africa. Tens of thousands of years ago, a people now known as the San developed out of prehistoric people, said Michael De Jongh, a professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of South Africa. The Khoi settled in the country 2,000 years ago. Then, starting about 800 years ago, Black Africans from elsewhere on the continent migrated to South Africa.

Indigenous communities were broken up over many years, so to be Indigenous in South Africa became a matter of identifying with the culture and practicing the traditions, rather than proving one’s ancestry. In recent decades, a global resurgence of interest in Indigenous people helped prompt the formation of myriad groups in South Africa claiming First Nations heritage. Parliament passed a law in 2019 that will allow Indigenous groups to apply for official recognition. Many people have claimed to be First Nations leaders.

Mr. Khoisan, 60, who identifies as chief of the Goringhaicona Cultural Council, argued that Mr. Jenkins was being used as a frontman for the mostly white, anti-development residents’ association of Observatory, the suburb that surrounds the site. He also said that Mr. Jenkins was not actually Indigenous, but from Zimbabwe, and that his allies were a small group of “pretenders.”

“Many of them are led by chiefs with an I.Q. way below room temperature,” Mr. Khoisan said.

Mr. Jenkins, 41, who identifies as the high commissioner of the Goringhaicona Khoi Khoi Indigenous Traditional Council, called Mr. Khoisan’s description of him racist. He said he is South African and has been sworn in as an Indigenous leader, but was born in Zimbabwe because his parents were activists living there in exile. In turn, he accused Mr. Khoisan, a former journalist and anti-apartheid activist, of leading “a crony group of chiefs” who are creating confusion about First Nations identity to help the developer.

Indigenous leaders and researchers generally agree that somewhere in the vicinity of the development, which is tucked between the Black and Liesbeek Rivers, Khoi warriors fought off an attack by the Portuguese explorer Francisco d’Almeida in 1510 in the first resistance to colonialism in South Africa. The first colonial claim to land also occurred in this general area by the Dutch settler Jan van Riebeeck in the late 17th century.

In 1939, the public rail company finished building a whites-only sports club for its workers on what is now the development site. In recent years, it has been a private golf course and driving range.

The property owner, Liesbeek Leisure Property Trust, announced in late 2015 that it planned to build a development there. Mr. Jenkins first raised concern at a public meeting with the developer in early 2018.

“It’s a silencing of a very powerful history that draws us to the original sin,” Mr. Jenkins said of developing on land where colonizers attacked Indigenous people.

In mid-2019, after provincial officials accused the developer of not properly consulting First Nations people, Indigenous supporters of the development emerged publicly for the first time.

Mr. Khoisan and his allies formed a group called the First Nations Collective, which supported the development at public hearings and in newsletters.

They negotiated an agreement with the developer to build a First Nations heritage and media center, operated by Indigenous people, as well as an amphitheater, medicinal garden and educational signage.

The developer said on its website that the collective represented “the vast majority of senior Khoi and San leaders,” and that the development had the support of “relevant” First Nations peoples.

Patric Tariq Mellet, a leading scholar on Indigenous South Africans, said in an email that while the leaders of the collective had solid credentials, neither side can claim to represent all of the Khoi or other marginalized Indigenous communities.

But Mr. Mellet was skeptical about the developer’s commitment to honor Indigenous heritage, calling it a “gate-opening exercise” that may be abandoned.

Jody Aufrichtig, one of the developers, said he had sought to work with Indigenous people from the project’s start. As proof, he provided an email from Ron Martin, a Khoi leader and heritage expert, from August 2016, in which Mr. Martin thanked Mr. Aufrichtig for engaging with First Nations people, and offered to provide consulting services for 22,700 rand (about \$1,500).

Mr. Martin said in an interview that he never did the consulting work and has not received any payment from Mr. Aufrichtig.

“Any sort of inference that we as a collective or Khoi people as a whole have sold their souls to a development for eight pieces of silver, it’s ridiculous,” he said. “We are in this for a much, much bigger thing. It’s for conserving the heritage narrative of the Khoi and San people.”

Amazon, which has three data centers in the Cape Town area, has been conspicuously quiet as the controversy swirls, declining to comment for this or other news outlets’ coverage.

Cape Town’s environmental management department appealed the approval given by another agency, warning that the development carried “significant cumulative negative environmental impacts and risks, particularly to flooding.”

And the provincial agency, Heritage Western Cape, argued that the development would compromise the site’s value as a sacred place for Indigenous people.

As the debate dragged on, the developer warned city officials “that he may lose Amazon as an interested partner in the development,” said Marian Nieuwoudt, a Cape Town City Council member. (The developer’s representative denied this in an interview.)

Ultimately, the provincial minister for environmental affairs approved the project last February, arguing that the developers, who altered the design more than 250 times, did enough to mitigate flood risk and enhance the site’s heritage value. He also praised the development’s plan to convert the private golf club into mostly public park land. The then-mayor of Cape Town signed off on the project last April.

James Vos, a City Council member overseeing economic development, said of Amazon, “To have them land their headquarters here in Cape Town, it means the world.”

But getting to this point has tarnished the longtime struggle for Indigenous recognition, said Cecil le Fleur, the chairman of the National Khoi and San Council, which the government formed more than 20 years ago to represent Indigenous interests. He said he took no position on the development.

“I don’t feel happy when I see how our people get more and more divided,” he said.

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/26/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#economy-savings-rate
GIST	<p>Americans have collectively saved trillions of dollars since the pandemic began. But they aren't exactly feeling flush with cash — and now there are signs that the pandemic-era savings boom may be coming to an end.</p> <p>Savings soared during the first year of the pandemic as the federal government handed out hundreds of billions of dollars in unemployment benefits, economic impact payments and other forms of aid, and as households spent less on vacations, concerts and other in-person activities. The saving rate — the share of after-tax income that is invested or saved, rather than spent — topped 33 percent in April 2020 and remained elevated through late last year.</p> <p>But the saving rate fell in the second half of 2021, returning roughly to its prepandemic level of about 7 percent last fall. In January, Americans saved just 6.4 percent of their after-tax income, the lowest monthly saving rate since 2013, as millions of employees lost hours because of the latest coronavirus wave, and this time the government did not step in to provide aid.</p> <p>Still, Americans in the aggregate have roughly \$2.7 trillion in “excess savings” accumulated since the pandemic began, by some estimates.</p> <p>In a survey conducted this month for The New York Times by the online research firm Momentum, however, only 16 percent of respondents said they had more in savings than before the pandemic, and 50 percent said they had less. Among lower-income households, just 9 percent said they had more in savings, and 64 percent said they had less.</p> <p>The government measures the total savings of all households, which can be skewed by a relative handful of rich people. And it uses a broader definition of “saving” than most laypeople probably do — paying down debt, for example, is considered “saving” in official government statistics.</p> <p>But those factors can't fully explain the disconnect. According to anonymous banking records reviewed by researchers at the JPMorgan Chase Institute, for example, median checking account balances remained significantly above their prepandemic level at the end of December, though they have fallen since their peak last spring. And while high-income households had far more money in their accounts on average, low-income households had experienced a bigger jump in savings on a percentage basis.</p> <p>“We're still seeing this picture that cash balances are still elevated in general, and they're elevated more so for low-income families,” said Fiona Greig, co-president of the institute.</p> <p>Dr. Greig said it was possible that balances had shrunk further since December, when monthly child tax credit payments ended. Brianna Richardson, a research scientist at Momentum, said it was also possible that survey respondents were misremembering how much money they had before the pandemic, perhaps because their savings grew so much earlier in the crisis. Inflation could also be affecting people's assessments, because the same dollar amount in savings won't go as far as prices rise.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 CDC study questions isolation guidelines
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/25/science/cdc-isolation-guidelines.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
GIST	<p>More than half of people who took a rapid antigen test five to nine days after first testing positive for the coronavirus or after developing Covid-19 symptoms tested positive on the antigen test, according to a new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The finding raises more concerns about the agency's revised isolation guidelines, which say that many people with Covid can end their isolation periods after five days, without a negative coronavirus test.</p>

A C.D.C. scientist who was an author of the study said that he did not believe the agency's isolation guidelines needed to change. But the results suggest that many people with the virus may still be infectious during this period, scientists said.

The study "demonstrates what a lot of people have suspected: that five days is insufficient for a substantial number of people," Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization at the University of Saskatchewan, said in an email. "The bottom line," she added, "is that this absolutely should lead to a change in isolation guidance."

The research was conducted after Omicron became the dominant variant in the United States and as cases were surging nationwide. Cases [have since fallen precipitously](#), reducing the risk of infection and the number of Americans who are in isolation.

The C.D.C. shortened the isolation period to five days from 10 in December as the Omicron variant spread. Many public health experts [criticized the move](#), noting that people might still be infectious after five days and that allowing them to end isolation without testing might help the new variant spread faster.

Dr. Ian Plumb, a medical epidemiologist at the C.D.C. and an author of the new study, said that he believed the study "basically supported" the agency's current isolation guidance, which asks people to continue taking precautions — including wearing masks and refraining from travel — until 10 full days have passed.

"I honestly don't think that it means that the current guidance needs to" change, he said.

Instead, he said, the study supports the idea that antigen tests can be successfully integrated into isolation guidelines.

"I think the biggest takeaway is that it's possible to incorporate antigen tests into the guidance for isolation because they provide additional information about someone's risk of being potentially infectious," he said.

The new study was based on people whose coronavirus infections were reported to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, which provides health care for rural communities in southwestern Alaska, from Jan. 1 to Feb. 9.

In early January, Yukon-Kuskokwim issued new isolation guidelines. It recommends that people isolate for 10 full days after testing positive for or developing symptoms of the virus. However, people who had no symptoms or resolving symptoms, and had not had fevers for at least 24 hours, on Days 5 through 9 of their isolation periods were eligible for free Abbott BinaxNOW rapid antigen tests, administered by Yukon-Kuskokwim staff members. If they tested negative, they could end their isolation periods early.

Among the 729 people who took antigen tests on Days 5 through 9 of their isolation periods, 54.3 percent of them tested positive. The proportion of people who tested positive declined over time: 67.5 percent tested positive on Day 5 of their isolation periods, compared with 38.6 percent on Day 9.

People who had symptomatic infections were more likely to test positive on Days 5 through 9 than those who had been asymptomatic, the researchers found. People who had received a primary vaccine series — two doses of an mRNA vaccine or a single dose of Johnson & Johnson's shot — or had been previously infected by the virus were less likely to receive positive antigen results during this time frame than those who had not been vaccinated or previously infected.

"Ultimately, I don't think this is surprising based off the data we're seeing and the general concern from the infectious disease community on shortening isolation in the face of a novel variant," said Saskia Popescu, an infectious disease epidemiologist at George Mason University. "But I do think it's important we continue to assess this, as antigen tests aren't a perfect proxy for infectiousness and ability to transmit the virus."

	<p>The findings are consistent with several other recent studies, which have not yet been published in scientific journals or reviewed by outside experts. In one, researchers found that more than 40 percent of vaccinated health care workers tested positive on rapid antigen tests on Days 5 through 10 of their illnesses.</p> <p>In two other studies, researchers found that a substantial proportion of people with suspected and confirmed Omicron infections still had high viral loads more than five days after first testing positive for the virus.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Putin's war ushers in crisis for Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/europe/russian-economy-ukraine-war.html
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — President Vladimir V. Putin has ushered in a crisis for his country — in its economy and identity.</p> <p>The Kremlin is hiding the reality of the country's attack on Ukraine from its own people, even cracking down on news outlets that call it a "war."</p> <p>But the economic carnage and societal turmoil wrought by Mr. Putin's invasion is becoming increasingly difficult to obscure.</p> <p>Airlines canceled once-ubiquitous flights to Europe. The Central Bank scrambled to deliver ruble bills as the demand for cash spiked 58-fold. Economists warned of more inflation, greater capital flight and slower growth; and the S&P credit rating agency downgraded Russia to "junk" status.</p> <p>The emphasis on hiding the war's true extent was a sign that the Kremlin fears that Russians would disapprove of a violent, full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a country where many millions of Russians have relatives and friends.</p> <p>Even so, more public figures with ties to the state spoke out against the war, including a lawmaker in Russia's rubber-stamp Parliament. Business owners tried to assess the consequences of an economic crisis that appeared already to be beginning, even before sanctions were fully in place.</p> <p>Facing the greatest test yet of its reality-distorting prowess, the Kremlin's propaganda machine for the moment appeared to be keeping widespread opposition to the war in check. There were no signs that the war could undermine Mr. Putin's hold on power, and in the event of a speedy victory, analysts noted, it could end up strengthening it.</p> <p>But the enormous risks of the war, along with the economic pressure the country was suddenly under, have created a new and more treacherous reality for both the Kremlin and Russia's 145 million people.</p> <p>Russians have been stunned at how quickly the economic impact of the war was being felt. The ruble hit its lowest level ever against the dollar, which traded at about 84 rubles on Saturday compared to 74 a few weeks ago. That sent prices for imports surging, while sanctions on Russia's largest banks wreaked havoc in the financial markets and new export restrictions promised to scramble supply chains.</p> <p>"Those who shout that Putin is great and bravo to him are no longer shouting as loud," said Lalya Sadykova, the owner of a chain of beauty salons in St. Petersburg. "They're in shock from what is happening, from how quickly prices are changing and how suppliers are stopping deliveries."</p> <p>The chief executive of one of Russia's biggest electronics retailers, DNS, said on Thursday that a supply crunch had forced his chain to raise prices some 30 percent. Days earlier, the chief executive, Dmitri Alekseyev, had posted on Facebook: "For the life of me I can't understand why Russia needs a war."</p> <p>"I understand that the prices in stores provoke frustration," Mr. Alekseyev wrote. "But that's the reality."</p> <p>S7, Russia's second-largest airline, suspended all of its flights to Europe because of airspace closures to Russian companies, an early sign that the cheap and easy travel to the West that middle-class Russians had</p>

grown used to could become a thing of the past. Photos of retailers changing or removing their price tags went viral on social media.

“We’re all waiting for what happens next,” said Anastasia Baranova, describing a wave of cancellations on Friday at the hotel she runs in St. Petersburg. “It’s as though the whole country is on pause.”

The Kremlin rushed to maintain its narrative, signaling the start of a new and more brutal phase in its long-running crackdown on dissent. The government’s communications regulator slowed down access to Facebook and warned 10 Russian news outlets that their websites could be blocked. The outlets’ declared offense was publishing articles “in which the operation that is being carried out is called an attack, an invasion or a declaration of war.”

Even as a vicious battle for Kyiv unfolded on Saturday morning, a Russian Defense Ministry statement about the situation in Ukraine made no mention of the Ukrainian capital or any Russian casualties. The ministry, which typically releases sleek and copious footage daily of the Russian military in action, published no videos of its combat operations in Ukraine.

And Russia’s state-run news channel on Saturday showed footage of a peaceful day in Kyiv to try to counter the videos of violence spreading on the social network Telegram.

“As you can see, the situation in the cities is calm,” the anchor said. “No explosions, no bombings, unlike what some of the Telegram channels are writing.”

A hint of the potential opposition came on Saturday when Mikhail Matveyev, a Communist lawmaker who had voted to endorse Mr. Putin’s recognition of the Russian-backed separatist territories, wrote on Twitter that he had been tricked.

“I was voting for peace, and not for war,” he wrote, “and not for Kyiv to be bombed.”

It was a rare crack in the firmament of the Parliament, where dissent over Mr. Putin’s key foreign policy decisions has been virtually nonexistent in recent years. Tatyana Yumasheva, the daughter of former President Boris N. Yeltsin who helped bring Mr. Putin to power, posted an antiwar message on Facebook.

The Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, a sleek showcase of a Westward-looking Russia founded by the Kremlin-friendly oligarch Roman Abramovich, declared it would cease working on new exhibits until the “human and political tragedy” ceased in Ukraine.

“We cannot keep up the illusion of normality,” the museum said. “We see ourselves as part of a greater world that is not broken up by war.”

Still, it appeared on Saturday that the Kremlin’s enforced blinders were doing their job, as were the clear dangers of voicing dissent. The spontaneous antiwar rallies that brought several thousand people to the streets in cities across the country on Thursday, with more than 1,500 arrests, were not repeated at that scale on Friday.

While many in Russia’s intellectual elite voiced horror and the fence across from the Ukrainian embassy in Moscow filled up with flowers, there was little evidence of a broader groundswell of opposition.

“The propaganda is working very well,” said Anastasia Nikolskaya, a Moscow sociologist. “It’s not that anyone is welcoming the war, but it is being seen as a last-ditch measure that is necessary.”

The main determining factor for what comes next, of course, will be what happens on the battlefield in Ukraine — the longer the war lasts and the greater the loss of life and destruction, the more difficult it will be for the Kremlin to cast the war as a limited operation not directed against the Ukrainian people.

Andrei Kortunov, director general of the Russian International Affairs Council, a research organization close to the Russian government, said he believed that the Kremlin expected the fighting to last no more than two weeks.

If Russia forced a capitulation of the Ukrainian army within that time, with limited destruction and limited Russian and civilian casualties, Mr. Kortunov said, Mr. Putin should be able to count on continuing domestic support.

But if the war does not go according to plan, Mr. Kortunov cautioned, the country could see “serious political consequences and consequences for the popularity of the leadership.”

“Victory will write off a lot — not everything, but a lot,” Mr. Kortunov said. “If there is no victory, then there may be some complications because of course, many doubt that there were no other policy alternatives.”

There were indications that recent days were only the beginning of a new chapter in Mr. Putin’s conflict with the West and of his crackdown on freedoms at home. Dmitri A. Medvedev, the vice chairman of Mr. Putin’s security council, speculated in a social-media post on Saturday that Russia might reintroduce the death penalty or seize foreigners’ assets in Russia as a response to Western sanctions.

“The interesting part is only beginning ...,” he wrote.

Despite the economic pain, sanctions are unlikely to alter Russia’s course in the near term, analysts say. Russia has the reserves to prop up the ruble, and the Kremlin has worked to insulate the economy from external shocks since it was hit by sanctions over the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The real cost of sanctions will be Russia’s long-term development, said Yevgeny Nadorshin, chief economist at the PF Capital consulting company in Moscow. Incomes will further stagnate, and the country’s middle class will continue shrinking. Many of the country’s manufacturers that launched the production of modern trains, cars and other products over the past decade will face serious trouble if the West bans technology exports to Russia, he said.

The country will be stable, Mr. Nadorshin said. However, he added, this stability “will resemble a swamp where nothing happens and changes even as forests burn around it.”

“Some reeds will bloom in this swamp, but there will only be scorched land around it,” said Mr. Nadorshin. “You can get into that swamp, but you will get stuck in it and you may eventually drown.”

And beyond the economic impact of the war, many Russians could not yet imagine coming to terms with living in a country that had launched an unprovoked assault on its neighbor. A steady stream of people came to the Ukrainian embassy in Moscow on Friday, bringing flowers. A police officer prevented a woman from also leaving a small sign that said: “Yes to peace.”

“I fear meeting Ukrainians and looking them in the eye,” said a designer, Aleksei, 28, declining to give his last name for fear of repercussions from the security services. “That is the scariest thing of all.”

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HEADLINE	02/25 Chechen kill squads sent into Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/politics/chechen-kill-squad-ukraine-russia/2022/02/25/id/1058575/
GIST	<p>Chechen kill squads have been ordered into Ukraine to take out specific members of the country's government, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, according to a Moscow Telegram channel with links to the security establishment.</p> <p>The Daily Mail first reported the news.</p>

	<p>Chechnya, Russia's predominantly Muslim region run by Ramzan Kadyrov, has shown support for the attack.</p> <p>According to a local news site, Chechnya Today, Kadyrov said his troops were prepared to take part "in any special operation," if needed, and urged Zelenskyy to call Putin and offer an apology.</p> <p>The Chechen soldiers were given decks of cards with photographs of their targets, according to the Daily Mail.</p> <p>There was speculation that those identified by Moscow as Nazis would also be on the hunted list.</p> <p>Zelenskyy on Friday addressed the nation wearing a military-style green T-shirt to warn that "enemy saboteur groups" were marauding through Kyiv, Ukraine's capital. The Ukrainian leader also said his family remained in the country, including his wife, Olena, and their two children, Aleksandra and Kiril.</p> <p>"My family is not a traitor, but a citizen of Ukraine," he said, adding that he would not reveal their location.</p> <p>"According to our information, the enemy marked me as the number one target. My family is the number two goal. They want to destroy Ukraine politically by destroying the Head of State."</p> <p>Ukraine says Russia has bombed 33 civilian sites in Kyiv in the last 24 hours.</p> <p>Russia's assault on Ukraine began Thursday.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Sports-Russia stripped of major events
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russia-ukraine-sports/2022/02/25/id/1058585/
GIST	<p>As Russian forces moved deeper into Ukraine on Friday, sports bodies moved quickly to strip Russia of events, with St Petersburg losing the Champions League final while the Formula One Grand Prix will not be held in Sochi.</p> <p>Russia launched its invasion by land, air and sea on Thursday following a declaration of war by President Vladimir Putin, with an estimated 100,000 people fleeing as explosions and gunfire rocked major cities.</p> <p>European soccer governing body UEFA decided to relocate the Champions League final — club soccer's showpiece event — to the Stade de France in Paris after receiving support from French President Emmanuel Macron.</p> <p>The decision was met with regret by the Kremlin but welcomed by UK Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries.</p> <p>"Russia must not be allowed to exploit sporting and cultural events on the world stage to legitimise its unprovoked, premeditated and needless attack against a sovereign democratic state," Dorries said.</p> <p>Formula One, motorsport's governing body FIA and the teams discussed the situation and came to the conclusion that it was "impossible to hold the Russian Grand Prix in the current circumstances".</p> <p>The race, which joined the calendar in 2014, was scheduled for Sept. 25 at Sochi's Olympic Park. On Thursday, both former champion Sebastian Vettel and reigning champion Max Verstappen said it was "wrong" to race in Russia.</p> <p>After Poland, Sweden and the Czech Republic refused to play World Cup qualifiers in Russia, UEFA said home games of Ukrainian and Russian club and national teams competing in UEFA competitions would be played at neutral venues.</p>

That could affect Spartak Moscow's chances in the Europa League after they were drawn with German side RB Leipzig. The Russian team had the advantage of being seeded for the draw but will now have to play the second leg at a neutral venue.

Five World Cup skiing events that were scheduled to take place in Russia this weekend and next month have been cancelled or moved by the International Ski Federation (FIS) in the interest of safety and integrity of the competition.

"Participants are already on site at the two World Cup events that were planned for this weekend and FIS is working closely with the involved stakeholders to ensure their quick return back home," it said.

'SEPARATE FROM POLITICS'

However, there were bodies reluctant to strip Russia of events, with the international volleyball federation (FIVB) saying preparations for the men's world championship to be held in Russia in August were proceeding as planned.

"While the FIVB believes that sport should always remain separate from politics, we are closely monitoring the situation to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all participants at our events which is our top priority," the FIVB told Reuters.

The FIVB did not say whether there would be any sanctions for the Russian volleyball federation.

English Premier League club Manchester United said they have withdrawn Russian airline Aeroflot's sponsorship rights. Aeroflot was banned from flying to the United Kingdom on Thursday with its foreign carrier permit suspended.

Finnish ice hockey team Jokerit said they were ending their Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) season ahead of next month's playoffs.

Club chairman Jari Kurri said he took the decision on Thursday but had to delay an announcement until he discussed it with the league first.

The team has regularly qualified for the playoffs but Kurri said it was "impossible" to continue their season in the Russian-based league.

The International Tennis Federation also has events scheduled in Russia and Ukraine this year. But it took steps to postpone a World Tennis Tour tournament scheduled to take place in Ukraine in April.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Federal data: inflation still rising
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/fed-inflation-wages-real-estate/2022/02/26/id/1058602/
GIST	<p>The Federal Reserve's preferred measure of inflation rose again in January and a new report from the central bank warned that price pressures could persist unless a shortage of available workers begins to ease.</p> <p>The new inflation data, alongside the developing sense at the central bank that inflation may prove harder than anticipated to dislodge, will likely firm the central bank's intent to raise interest rates through the year, beginning with an initial hike in March from the current near zero level.</p> <p>Policymakers will have to weigh one fresh and unanticipated set of risks in their discussion: The Russian military invasion of Ukraine could roil the economic outlook in unpredictable ways, and potentially undermine global growth and financial markets.</p> <p>But Fed officials say that's unlikely to shift their immediate plans to begin tightening monetary policy in response to inflation that is not only high but continues moving higher.</p>

The personal consumption expenditures price index rose at a 6.1% annual rate through January, its highest since 1982 and more than triple the 2% inflation rate the Fed has set as its target for the U.S. economy.

That measure of annual inflation, reported monthly by the government, has been as high or higher than in the prior month for 14 straight months - a run not seen since the 1970s and a blow to arguments commonly heard at the Fed last year that rising prices would prove "transitory" and disappear as the economy reopened.

The month-to-month change in the same index, watched by some officials as a signal of moderation, showed no sign of easing.

"EXCEEDINGLY HOT?"

The Fed is set to raise interest rates when it meets on March 15-16. Officials have been debating whether the initial "liftoff" should be a standard quarter point increase, or a larger half point hike to demonstrate the Fed's seriousness in controlling prices.

On Thursday, Fed Governor Christopher Waller flagged Friday's PCE inflation report as one to watch, saying if it shows "the economy is still running exceedingly hot, a strong case can be made for a 50-basis-point hike in March."

For now at least the data are not only hot but getting hotter: Since September the PCE index has jumped in steady increments from 4.4% to 6.1%, and has either risen or held level with the prior month in each report since November 2020.

In the Fed's latest monetary policy report to Congress, issued twice a year, central bank officials acknowledged that inflation had not eased as they expected, but in fact had broadened through the economy.

The "extraordinary circumstances" which the Fed had said last July were driving higher prices had given way to other dynamics, the report said, particularly a workforce falling far short of the numbers demanded by businesses to fill open positions.

"In the period ahead, the large price changes in goods may ease once supply chain disruptions finally resolve," the Fed report stated. "But, if labor shortages continue and wages rise faster than productivity in a broad-based way, inflation pressures may persist and continue to broaden."

Fed officials have largely downplayed the risk of a durable "wage price spiral."

But they've also been surprised by much of what's happened during the reopening from the pandemic.

The rapid spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant was expected to slow hiring and spending through the winter. It didn't happen. Job growth continued, and new spending data released on Friday showed consumer spending exceeded expectations.

Now the virus is fading and Fed officials anticipate a renewed sense of reopening in society and the economy will keep growth strong.

Trading in futures contracts based on expectations of Fed policy show investors downplaying the chance now of a half-point increase.

But the PCE report is still moving in the wrong direction for Fed officials hoping to avoid the most aggressive measures to control inflation.

"Though diminished, the chance of a 50bp move is still intact," wrote III Capital Chief Economist Karim Basta. Inflation at 6% "would definitely qualify as hot."

	<p>The main factor tempering arguments for a faster move by the Fed is the economic fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That could for a variety of reasons drive prices higher; it could also pose risks to global economic growth, or rattle financial markets in a way that could make the Fed less inclined to raise rates as fast as it would otherwise.</p> <p>With the incursions less than 48 hours old that analysis was just beginning.</p> <p>"In theory, the war has two contrasting effects on Fed policy: It could stoke inflation...and it could slow economic growth," wrote Piper Sandler macro analysts Roberto Perli and Benson Durham. "The Fed is likely to be more concerned about the latter than the former...The war will not delay liftoff...But it could well result in fewer rate hikes this year than the market is currently pricing."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 US warship transits Taiwan Strait
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/us-taiwan-navy-warship/2022/02/26/id/1058607/
GIST	<p>A U.S. warship sailed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait on Saturday, part of what the U.S. military calls routine activity, which nonetheless irritates China.</p> <p>The U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet said the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson was conducting a "routine" transit through international waters.</p> <p>"The ship's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," 7th Fleet spokesperson Nicholas Lingo said in a statement. "The United States military flies, sails, and operates anywhere international law allows."</p> <p>China's Defence Ministry did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment.</p> <p>Taiwan's Defence Ministry said the ship sailed in a northerly direction through the Strait, that its forces had monitored its passage and observed nothing out of the ordinary.</p> <p>Taiwan is currently in a heightened state of alert due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, nervous that China may try to take advantage of the situation to make a move on the island though the government has reported no unusual Chinese maneuvers.</p> <p>Last year, U.S. naval ships transited the Strait roughly monthly. Saturday's sailing was the first since November.</p> <p>China claims democratically ruled Taiwan as its own territory and has mounted repeated air force missions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the past two years, provoking anger in Taipei.</p> <p>Beijing calls Taiwan the most sensitive and important issue in its relations with Washington.</p> <p>Like most countries, the United States has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan but is its most important international backer and arms supplier.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Hungary opens border to Ukraine residents
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/world/globaltalk/hungary-viktor-orban-border-refugees/2022/02/26/id/1058644/
GIST	<p>Hungary has announced it has opened its border to all citizens and legal residents of Ukraine, even those that might have been subject to military conscription in the Ukrainian armed forces.</p> <p>"We're letting everyone in," Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said in a Saturday news conference. "I've seen people who have no travel documents, but we're providing them too with travel documents. And we're also allowing in those who have arrived from third countries after the proper screening."</p>

	<p>The news is noteworthy, because Orban has been opposed to all forms of immigration in his country, and he has never made any secret of his desire for warm ties with Russia and President Vladimir Putin, according to Reuters.</p> <p>Hungary has five border crossings along its 85-mile border with Ukraine and thousands of refugees fleeing the Russian invasion have crossed in recent days, according to The Associated Press.</p> <p>Orban has been Putin's closest ally in the European Union, but he said Russia's invasion of Hungary's neighbor will likely change his stance.</p> <p>Hungary will now support all European Union sanctions against Russia and will not block anything, Orban said Saturday, speaking on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border.</p> <p>"Hungary made clear that we support all the sanctions, so we will block nothing, so what the prime ministers of the European Union are able to agree, we accept it and we support it," he told reporters in English.</p> <p>"This is the time to be united, it's a war," he said, adding that peace efforts were the most important.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Truckers face further fuel price increases
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/truckers-face-further-fuel-price-increases-on-crude-markets-volatility-11645810325?mod=hp_minor_pos13
GIST	<p>Trucking companies already coping with higher fuel costs are bracing for further increases in prices for diesel as Russia's invasion of Ukraine roils energy markets, sending crude oil prices surging above \$100 a barrel.</p> <p>Average diesel prices across the U.S. have jumped more than 44 cents a gallon since the start of the year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, and the national average price of \$4.055 a gallon for the week ended Feb. 21 was the highest level since March 2013.</p> <p>The latest increases came before Russia's attack on Ukraine disrupted oil flows around the world as the energy industry moved to pre-empt possible U.S. restrictions on Russian exports. Shipping companies this week refused to load tankers with the main grade of Russia crude, traders and shipping executives said, triggering a sharp run-up in crude prices before a pullback on Friday.</p> <p>Smaller trucking companies and independent drivers face the greatest exposure to the volatility, industry experts said, because they can't hedge their fuel purchases the way larger carriers can. Smaller operators also generally buy diesel at retail rates at the pump rather than through volume discounts that flow to larger operators.</p> <p>"The large carriers are typically very sophisticated and make sure that they're applying the fuel surcharge consistently and collecting it," said Todd Fowler, an equity research analyst at KeyBanc Capital Markets who covers trucking. A prolonged run-up in fuel prices, he said, could trigger "some attrition among the smaller carriers, given some of the challenges in navigating higher fuel costs."</p> <p>Fuel is typically a trucking company's second-largest operating expense, after labor, and can make up more than 10% of a carrier's costs.</p> <p>Trucking companies pass along the rising costs to customers with fuel surcharges that seek to minimize the impact of price fluctuations. But there can be a lag between the time prices rise, surcharges are adjusted and customers begin paying the higher cost, industry experts said, which can pinch the finances of smaller carriers.</p>

	<p>Smaller operators have proliferated in recent years and are likely to face financial strains if they can't get paid quickly enough to cover the higher cost of fuel, said Avery Vise, a vice president at research firm FTR Transportation Intelligence. January saw the highest number of businesses revoking their operating authority since Hurricane Katrina pushed up gas prices in 2005, he said.</p> <p>DAT Solutions LLC, which matches shipper loads to available trucks, said the average fuel surcharge for truckload carriers reached 41 cents per mile in January, up 17 cents from the year before, and was at 45 cents this month.</p> <p>The bigger threat that rising energy prices pose to the trucking sector may be if higher costs for gasoline hit the broader U.S. economy and dampen consumer spending.</p> <p>More household spending on gasoline could undercut spending on retail goods, which "could have an overall effect on consumer confidence and, ultimately, consumption," said Old Dominion Freight Line Inc. Chief Financial Officer Adam Satterfield. "So certainly there could be a negative effect down the line, depending on how long we see these types of escalated costs."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 China social media mocks West response
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/mockery-of-west-warnings-to-taiwan-fill-chinese-social-media-after-ukraine-invasion-11645798598
GIST	<p>HONG KONG—Anyone seeking news on the latest Russia-Ukraine developments in the Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily would be disappointed: Its front page and international section were devoid of articles on the conflict gripping the planet, reflecting the reluctance of China's leaders to take a clear stance on it.</p> <p>However, on China's more freewheeling social media, internet users and prominent nationalist voices offered sympathy for Russian President Vladimir Putin, at times casting doubt on the West's reliability and blaming the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for fueling the conflict.</p> <p>On the Twitter-like Weibo platform, a page sponsored by state broadcaster China Central Television and populated with posts carrying the hashtag "Ukraine's President Says the West Abandoned Ukraine" had more than 1.1 billion views by Friday afternoon.</p> <p>Chinese internet users openly mocked what they saw as a toothless response by Western countries to the Russian assault on Ukraine, while drawing parallels to Taiwan, a separately-governed island off the coast of mainland China that Beijing has vowed to take control of, by force if necessary.</p> <p>Others said they were against war and expressed sympathy with the Ukrainian people and its soldiers.</p> <p>"The lack of comments from the People's Daily, which primarily reflects consensus within the party leadership, means that discussions are still under way," said Igor Denisov, a senior research fellow at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. He said the prevailing discourse in China was more pro-Russian than in the past and reflected more of Russia's official talking points.</p> <p>Public interest in Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been immense. A state-media sponsored Weibo topic page for the latest updates from the Russian-Ukraine crisis has received more than 4 billion views since it was set up on Thursday.</p> <p>Reaction to Mr. Putin's offensive in official Chinese media and on social media reflects the difficult position Beijing occupies as images of bombed buildings, downed aircrafts and fleeing civilians emerge from Ukraine.</p> <p>Chinese leader Xi Jinping has maintained a close relationship with Mr. Putin and the two countries are more aligned than they have been in decades, due largely to a shared suspicion of the U.S. But too clear an</p>

endorsement of the Ukraine invasion by Beijing [risks antagonizing the U.S.](#) and Western Europe, while also undermining commitments to noninterference and territorial integrity that form the foundation of the Communist Party's foreign policy.

In [a call with Mr. Putin](#) on Friday afternoon, Mr. Xi said China would decide its position based on the merits of the Ukrainian situation, according to an official Chinese readout.

China's main state-controlled media outlets, such as the Xinhua News Agency and the state broadcaster CCTV, have mostly stuck to straightforward news reporting of the events on their official websites and through their social media accounts.

Other Chinese news outlets, such as the nationalist tabloid Global Times, have fewer constraints. In editorials over recent days, they have repeated an argument made by both Mr. Putin and China's Foreign Ministry that U.S. pressure forced Mr. Putin to strike out.

Hu Xijin, the former Global Times editor in chief who remains a powerful voice on China's internet, has written several commentaries in recent days attributing the cause of war to "NATO's ceaseless eastward expansion" and Ukraine's desire to join the military alliance.

Like China's Foreign Ministry and major state-media outlets, Mr. Hu took care to avoid the word "invasion," choosing instead to describe Russia's military actions with euphemistic flourish as Mr. Putin "drawing his sword."

The Weibo hashtag "Russia invades Ukraine" was blocked on Friday, though searches using the phrase still produced results.

In general, censorship on social media appeared relatively light as of Friday evening, with Chinese internet users expressing a range of views, including some criticism of Mr. Putin for starting a war.

Several nationalist social-media accounts promoted Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying's response to a journalist's question on whether China would send arms to Russia. More than 770,000 users liked the post carrying Ms. Hua's answer: "We won't. I believe that as a strong country, Russia doesn't need China or other countries to provide weapons to it."

As with their coverage of the U.S.'s chaotic pullout from Afghanistan last year, Chinese state media promoted content that portrayed Washington and other Western capitals as abandoning a developing country they had promised to back.

[One clip of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky](#) saying in the early hours Friday that he had asked 27 European leaders whether Ukraine would join NATO garnered more than 1.6 million likes. "I have asked directly. Everyone is afraid. No one answers," Mr. Zelensky said.

The most popular comment underneath the post read, "They all pay lip service, but no country has sent any troops."

In an editorial published Thursday, the Global Times warned that the West's lackluster response to Ukraine crisis should serve as a warning to Taiwan's ruling party, which has embraced Washington as it seeks more distance from the Chinese Communist Party.

"The performance of the U.S. in Ukraine should remind 'Taiwan independence' advocates: You cannot rely on Washington," the editorial read.

Many Chinese internet users seized on the theme and called for Taiwan to learn from Ukraine's predicament. One popular meme showed a pig labeled "Taiwan" watching another pig, marked "Ukraine," being slaughtered.

On Friday afternoon, a Chinese translation of Mr. Putin's Thursday speech—delivered as Russian troops began attacking Ukraine—started to go viral, garnering 1.9 million likes within six hours. Many popular comments praised the speech's eloquence and said they agreed with Mr. Putin's line of reasoning that having NATO allies so close to his country's border was unacceptable.

A clip of Ukrainians lining up to donate blood for troops attracted the praise of Chinese internet users but also calls on Ukrainians to surrender to avoid further bloodshed.

In several respects, the invasion has played out on Chinese social media the same way it has elsewhere. As in other parts of the internet, Chinese social media was rife with misinformation, including false videos that purported to show Russian troops overwhelming Ukrainian cities.

Internet giant Tencent Holdings Ltd., state-owned media outlet The Paper and independent fact-checking group "China Fact Check," rushed to debunk some of the videos, though some social media users continued to believe that Ukraine was close to surrendering.

Posts and articles decrying the devastation wrought by war were also widely shared.

Chinese internet users, like millions of their counterparts in other countries, were moved by a viral audio clip released by Ukrainian news outlet Ukrayinska Pravda on Friday that it said depicted a Ukrainian soldier on Snake island in the Black Sea refusing to surrender to an approaching Russian warship. All 13 border guards died, according to Mr. Zelensky.

Praise for the Ukrainian soldiers' valor was widespread on Chinese social media, but so was the fear that their deaths may have been in vain.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Ukraine forces repel Russia attack on Kiev
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-assault-on-ukraine-presses-forward-as-street-battles-rage-in-kyiv-11645864200?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos3
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine—Ukrainian forces and thousands of freshly recruited volunteers regained control of Kyiv's streets after Russian troops and undercover units in civilian clothes tried to enter the city in the early hours of Saturday, while Russian airstrikes, airborne landings and armored advances continued throughout the country.</p> <p>On the third day of the war that Russian President Vladimir Putin unleashed with the aim of overthrowing Ukraine's elected government and ending its alignment with the West, Ukrainian forces fought fiercely on all fronts, with each side asserting it had inflicted heavy losses on the other.</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelensky recorded a video address from the street outside the presidential headquarters in Kyiv, urging Ukrainians to keep fighting and denying Russian reports that he had called on his forces to lay down arms.</p> <p>"Truth is on our side. This is our land, our country, our children, and we will keep defending them all," he said. "Glory to Ukraine."</p> <p>A rapid Russian victory in the biggest war in Europe for decades would drastically change the geopolitical balance on the continent, giving Mr. Putin control of strategically vital swaths of the former Soviet Union's territory and placing Russia's armies on the doorstep of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.</p> <p>European and U.S. officials are increasingly concerned that Mr. Putin's broader goal of revising the ending of the Cold War, restoring Moscow's former sphere of influence in Europe's east, won't stop at Ukraine, a fear that could force a rethink of NATO's military stance and Europe's energy supplies, which depend in large part on Russia. Mr. Zelensky has constantly reinforced that message, saying that Ukrainians are fighting and dying not just for their own country but for all of Europe.</p>

If fierce Ukrainian resistance leads to a long and bloody war—or forces Mr. Putin to seek to end the fighting without achieving his goals—the setback could threaten both his hold on power in Moscow and his drive to restore Russia as a global power.

Mr. Zelensky, in an address on Saturday, said that Russia has failed in its quest to quickly replace him with a puppet regime and that Ukrainian soldiers were holding the line throughout the country. He called on Ukrainians abroad and foreign volunteers to join the fight. “Everyone who can, come back to defend Ukraine,” Mr. Zelensky said. “All the friends of Ukraine who want to come join us, come here too—we will give you weapons.”

On Friday, the biggest thrust of Russian forces, pouring in from the north, targeted Kyiv, an ancient city that was home to around three million people before Russian bombardments triggered a mass exodus of people toward western Ukraine, which is safer. Many who remained in the city spent the night in bomb shelters and underground subway stations.

Ukrainian civilians fleeing westward have been stuck in long lines of cars near the border with Poland. Many people have abandoned their cars and walked to the border for many hours in chilly weather, carrying children and a few belongings.

Ukraine’s Health Ministry said Saturday that 198 Ukrainian civilians, including three children, had been killed since the Russian invasion began, and 1,115 injured.

“We knew that the night would be difficult because the Russian Federation would use all its resources and reserves to inflict on us maximum damage in the maximum number of locations,” Mr. Zelensky’s adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, said early Saturday. “Kyiv is their priority number one because the main declared goal of the Russian operation is the annihilation of Ukraine’s political and military leadership. That is why they are pouring the maximum number of Russian troops toward Kyiv.”

A Russian column that attempted to advance from the West, on the highway linking Kyiv to Lviv, was destroyed in nighttime fighting inside Kyiv, witnesses said. Bodies lay on the ground, amid the smoldering remains of armored vehicles and trucks. Presumed Russian infiltrators, traveling in civilian vehicles, were also gunned down by Ukrainian troops as they tried to approach the Ukrainian Parliament building, the witnesses said. Intense firefights were reported in other locations throughout the capital.

After daybreak on Saturday, Ukrainian regular troops and volunteers of the newly formed Territorial Defense force regained the upper hand, erecting roadblocks, firing positions and other fortifications around the city, particularly in the government district and near bridges spanning the Dnipro river. Trucks accompanied by police ferried ammunition as civilians lined up patiently in grocery stores, at pharmacies and teller machines.

A large supermarket on Kyiv’s Antonovycha street was well stocked, with fresh bread, pineapples and Italian cheese, and some of the checkout lanes still accepted Apple Pay. A handful of basement bars reopened as makeshift shelters, serving espressos before the 5 p.m. curfew kicked in. At one bar, customers were asked to show their passports to prove that they weren’t Russian citizens.

The biggest lines in the Ukrainian capital were at the recruitment centers for the Territorial Defense. At one sports facility converted for this purpose, several hundred volunteers, commanded by career military officers, loaded crates of ammunition into civilian vehicles and sped off to their positions.

Outside, hundreds more aspiring recruits, including women, patiently waited their turn in a line that snaked around the building. “I never expected so many would turn up. The whole city has risen up now,” one of the officers at the site said. “A bit too late, but better late than never.”

Concerned about Russian infiltrators and spies, members of the Territorial Defense didn't allow photography and didn't provide their names. The volunteers said they had no choice but to fight now that Russian forces were on Kyiv's doorstep.

"A Russian rocket hit a building near my home this morning. This was the last straw for me, and now it's time to take up arms. Everyone in this city who wanted to escape has already fled," said one of the new recruits, a 35-year-old IT specialist.

"There is nowhere to run and no point in hiding. We just have to repel the invaders and send them back where they came from," said another, a human-resources specialist.

South of Kyiv, Russian airborne troops attempted a landing in the strategic town of Vasylkiv, the location of a Ukrainian military airfield. Firefights broke out during the night but by morning hundreds of Ukrainian troops and irregular volunteers armed with assault rifles patrolled Vasylkiv's main road. Along the highway running between Kyiv and Odessa near Vasylkiv, security forces and local volunteers wearing armbands were looking for stray Russian troops who might be hiding in the woods.

Ukrainian soldiers said they had driven off most of the Russian landing force in Vasylkiv. Kyiv also said Ukrainian forces had downed a Russian Il-76 transport plane full of airborne troops near Vasylkiv. That claim couldn't be independently confirmed. In the late morning, contrails of two jet fighters engaging in a dogfight could be seen in the blue skies above the town.

Intense fighting also went on through the night near the southern cities of Odessa, Kherson, Mykolaiv and Mariupol, Mr. Podolyak said.

On Friday, Moscow signaled an openness to talks with Kyiv. But shortly after, Mr. Putin excoriated Mr. Zelensky, calling him a terrorist and urging Ukraine's military to oust him, dimming prospects for diplomacy.

Mr. Zelensky is expected to speak to several world leaders later on Saturday, Mr. Podolyak said. On Friday, Mr. Zelensky spoke by phone with President Biden. A White House official said the call lasted about 40 minutes.

Mr. Zelensky wrote on Twitter, "Strengthening sanctions, concrete defense assistance and an antiwar coalition have just been discussed with @POTUS."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement Saturday that Washington would provide up to \$350 million in additional military aid to Ukraine, including "lethal defensive assistance" to help Kyiv resist Russian armored and airborne forces.

The weapons Washington intends to provide to Ukraine include Javelin antitank weapons, Stinger antiaircraft missiles, small arms and ammunition, U.S. officials said. The U.S. has previously sent Javelins among other battlefield systems. In January, the U.S. also gave approval for Latvia and Lithuania to deliver American-made Stinger antiaircraft missiles to Kyiv.

Mr. Biden authorized the fresh delivery of military aid Friday night and approved up to \$250 million for overall assistance to Ukraine. A person familiar with the matter said the administration has asked Congress for \$6.4 billion in additional funding for Ukraine aid and defense needs.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Ukraine invasion disrupts global air travel
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-air-travel-is-disrupted-by-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-11645871402?mod=hp_lead_pos6

Competing aviation sanctions and the narrowing of airspace available for commercial travel over Russia and Eastern Europe are adding strain on the global aviation industry, which is just starting to emerge from two years of travel restrictions related to Covid-19.

Airlines have had to reroute planes to avoid Ukraine and parts of Russia, while London and Moscow have barred each other from their respective airspace. Sharper Western sanctions on Russia and a [widening conflict in Ukraine](#) threaten to cut off more Russian airspace, a crucial corridor for many long-haul flights, particularly between Europe and Asia. The plane maker [Airbus](#) SE, for its part, could be caught up in restrictions over sales of planes and parts. The European Union is planning to ban such sales as part of sanctions aimed at punishing Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) for the invasion of Ukraine.

On Thursday, the U.K. banned Russian commercial jets, including those of the flag carrier [Aeroflot-Russian Airlines](#), from its airspace, part of the U.K.'s sanctions. On Friday, Russia responded by [banning British carriers](#) from its skies.

[Delta Air Lines](#) Inc. said Friday it would no longer sell seats on flights operated by Aeroflot or allow the Russian national airline to sell tickets on Delta flights. The airline didn't cite a reason for the change.

Delta said it is withdrawing its [code-sharing service](#) with Aeroflot effective immediately, ending a marketing agreement under which airlines sell tickets on each others' flights. The move affected the sale of tickets on a handful of Aeroflot-operated flights out of Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport, and it removed Aeroflot's right to sell tickets on Delta flights from Los Angeles and New York. Delta doesn't operate flights to Russia or Ukraine. Efforts to reach Aeroflot weren't successful.

There were also unexpected repercussions for Aeroflot on the ground. [Manchester United](#), the British soccer club, said it would withdraw its sponsorship agreement with the Russian airline. The carrier had been the team's official airline sponsor since 2013 and provided chartered flights for the team. "In light of events in Ukraine, we have withdrawn Aeroflot's sponsorship rights," the club said in a statement on its website. "We share the concerns of our fans around the world and extend our sympathies to those affected."

Early Thursday in Europe, the continent's air-traffic control coordinator warned commercial traffic [to avoid Ukraine's airspace](#). European authorities have since expanded that warning to include Moldova, Belarus, all operations in Russia within 200 nautical miles of the Ukrainian border and airspace in southwestern Russia. The restrictions don't restrict flights to or from Moscow itself. The changes forced a handful of airliners to change course midflight.

Some airlines have canceled flights out of caution. [Japan Airlines](#) Co. said it has canceled a weekly return flight between Moscow and Tokyo, citing safety precautions. The Dutch flag carrier, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, part of [Air France-KLM](#) SA, said it has scrapped its daily evening flight to Moscow in line with a new policy that prohibits crews staying overnight in Russia.

The U.S. cargo operators [United Parcel Service](#) Inc. and [FedEx](#) Corp. said they were preparing contingency plans for operations to Russia, without specifying actions being considered. Both, along with the express carrier DHL, a unit of [Deutsche Post](#) AG, said operations to Ukraine have been suspended.

The creeping airspace restrictions highlight the integral role Russia plays in global air travel. The quickest route for flights between Europe and the Pacific Rim is flying across Siberia. In the 1950s and 1960s, much of Russian airspace was kept closed by the Soviet Union. It wasn't until the thawing of relations between the Soviets and the West in the 1970s that Siberian airspace was opened to Western and Asian carriers, which at the time would make a stop for fuel in Moscow.

Since then, aircraft have been able to fly the distance directly, and the route has become a critical part of the [global flow of trade](#) and passengers between Asia and both Europe and the U.S. The route has provided a steady stream of revenue for Russian authorities, who charge fees for the use of the airspace and control access tightly. Almost 195,000 commercial flights passed through Russia's airspace in 2021,

according to the country's federal air transportation agency. As with most routes, traffic has been reduced during Covid-19 travel bans. Before the pandemic, that number reached 301,000.

"Losing the right to fly through Russian airspace would definitely have an operational impact," said a spokesman for the National Air Carrier Association, a trade group whose members include cargo carriers such as [Atlas Air Worldwide Holdings](#) Inc.

For British and Russian carriers, the fallout has been immediate. British Airways canceled a flight to Moscow scheduled to take place Friday and said it would be canceling its regular three-times-a-week service to the Russian capital. It cautioned that flights to destinations including India, Pakistan, Singapore and Thailand will be forced to reroute to avoid the airspace, lengthening those flights.

A British Airways Boeing 787 en route to London from Bangkok, which typically flies over Russia, was rerouted midflight on Friday, taking a sharp left turn over Kazakhstan to fly through Azerbaijan and Georgia airspace before crossing the southern part of the Black Sea close to Turkey.

[Among sanctions](#) that the European Union plans to approve is a ban on the sale of aircraft and spare parts to Russia. That could disrupt planned sales of jets by Airbus. The company has 14 A350 wide-body aircraft still due for delivery to Aeroflot. "We are analyzing the impact of the sanctions," a spokesman for Airbus said. "We will comply with all sanctions and applicable laws once they are in force."

Airbus rival [Boeing](#) Co. , meanwhile, has design centers in Russia that employ more than 2,000 under contract. The company said its operations in Russia have continued.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Booster shots slow as omicron surge fades
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-booster-shots-are-slowing-as-omicron-surge-fades-11645871402?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>Fewer people are getting vaccine booster shots in the U.S. as the Omicron Covid-19 surge fades and more Americans return to normal patterns of life, federal data show.</p> <p>The seven-day average for booster shots administered daily was about 149,000 on Feb. 19, down from a little more than a million in early December, when authorities expanded access and Omicron was first detected in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates.</p> <p>The agency says about half of booster-eligible people have gotten one so far, compared with about 69% of the eligible population who have completed a regular vaccine series.</p> <p>Public-health officials and researchers say they don't want people to lose a sense of urgency and leave themselves unprepared for another potential ramp-up in cases or possible new variants in the future.</p> <p>"I don't think any of us are sure we are out of the Covid era," said Meg Fisher, special adviser to New Jersey's health commissioner and a pediatric infectious-disease specialist. She said all types of vaccinations have slumped in the Garden State, which launched a week-long booster push on Wednesday that includes vaccine sites staying open longer to accommodate people.</p> <p>New Jersey, like New York, also has a mass text-messaging campaign targeting booster-eligible people. Colorado sent more than a million such messages last month. Maryland recently rolled out a new campaign that includes a possible \$1 million prize.</p> <p>Factors contributing to the booster slowdown likely include vaccinated people putting off additional shots after breakthrough infections, concerns that side effects like fevers and tiredness could cause them to miss work, and lack of urgency as case numbers plummet, according to Dr. Fisher.</p> <p>"As people become more complacent, they don't really see the need to get boosted," she said.</p>

Data have shown that boosters [can enhance protection](#) against Covid-19 that would otherwise fade several months after initial vaccinations. While breakthrough infections were common during the Omicron wave, boosters helped limit infections and the severity of cases including hospitalizations, when compared with vaccinated people who weren't boosted and the unvaccinated, CDC data show. The federal agency has also found that boosted people have the lowest rates of Covid-19 deaths.

About 66% of the fully vaccinated population ages 65 and up are boosted, according to CDC data, compared with about 47% of the entire fully vaccinated adult population. Geographic patterns mirror those for other vaccine shots, from the highest rates of adoption in some New England states to some of the lowest rates among Southern states.

Authorities started recommending boosters for older and vulnerable people in September, and in November the government recommended them for all adults.

The CDC currently recommends [boosters for anyone 12 years and older](#). People are advised to get boosters at least five months after they get their second dose of an mRNA vaccine from [Moderna](#) or Pfizer-BioNTech, or at least two months after the single [Johnson & Johnson](#) shot.

Omicron's decline has been rapid: The seven-day average for newly reported cases has fallen to below 75,000 from averages that topped 800,000 last month, data from Johns Hopkins University show. Hospitalization and death numbers are also heading lower.

CDC data, though subject to reporting lags and corrections in state submissions, appear to show demand is declining for both first vaccinations and boosters. The booster-eligible population is a prime target for getting more shots into arms because they have demonstrated a willingness to get the vaccine in the first place, researchers say.

"Encouraging people who are already vaccinated to get boosted should in theory be much more straightforward," said Pratha Sah, an associate research scientist at Yale School of Public Health.

Confusing messaging could also be hindering the booster effort. The CDC deems two mRNA shots a full vaccination, for example, but also says boosters are needed for optimal protection. Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, said at a recent press conference that residents have told health officials they weren't sure they were eligible or needed boosters.

In central Florida, 62-year-old Sherry Swendsen got the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine last summer because her retail job required it. She now works from home as a travel consultant and has declined boosters. She said she doesn't have underlying health issues and isn't persuaded by evidence showing boosters can reduce the odds of severe illness.

"Nobody can decide that, only God can," she said. "Just because you don't get the shot doesn't mean you're going to die from it."

The sharp rise in breakthrough infections during the Omicron surge likely means there are people who got Covid-19 while waiting on the sidelines before getting boosted, said Buddy Creech, an infectious-disease specialist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

Some physicians and researchers say the combination of infections and previous vaccine shots provide a high level of temporary immune-system protection. Waiting eight to 12 weeks after an infection to get the extra shot may provide a more effective boost, Dr. Creech said.

The CDC hasn't specified in its recommendations when vaccinated people who become infected should receive a booster, but says people should wait until they have fully recovered.

	<p>A mild Covid-19 case in January contributed to Jessica Turco Sandfort’s decision not to get additional Covid-19 vaccine shots, after her one Moderna dose in April last year. Concerns about vaccine side effects, and seeing people she knew contract and have few or no symptoms from infections, had already given her pause.</p> <p>“Now I feel like I have more antibodies, so I’m not rushing,” the 44-year-old community-college instructor said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Russia state media bolsters Putin narrative
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-state-media-bolster-putins-narrative-for-ukraine-invasion-11645874643
GIST	<p>MOSCOW—Russian authorities and state-controlled media outlets have issued disinformation that seeks to support President Vladimir Putin’s claims that Moscow was compelled to invade Ukraine to protect Russia’s own security.</p> <p>State broadcasters, lawmakers and pro-Kremlin pundits have sought to advance Mr. Putin’s narrative that Ukraine is an aggressor that threatens Russia and the Russian-controlled territories in the Donbas, in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>“The Armed Forces of Ukraine don’t stop shooting at settlements of Donbas,” Russia’s Channel One reported Friday.</p> <p>Earlier this week, Mr. Putin ordered an invasion of its smaller neighbor and, on Friday, Russian forces had entered Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, with fierce fighting that is threatening the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.</p> <p>State media has cited Ukrainian media saying residents of various cities, including the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, had heard several explosions and the sound of shelling. But Russian state news reports adhere closely to the Kremlin’s narrative, repeated in statements by Russia’s Defense Ministry, that their armed forces “do not strike cities and towns [and] they take measures to save the lives of civilians.”</p> <p>On Saturday, a special edition of the political talk show “60 Minutes” aired on Russia’s Channel One, showing residential buildings with shattered windows, blown-out walls and rivers of rubble on streets in the Russian-led Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, as a result of what was described as assaults by Ukrainian forces. Residents were shown picking through debris in their homes.</p> <p>Also on Saturday, Russia’s communications regulator ordered the removal of reports from media that describe Moscow’s attack on Ukraine as an “assault, invasion or declaration of war,” or face being fined or blocked. It accused several independent news organizations of publishing “false information...under the guise of reliable messaging.”</p> <p>“We emphasize that it is Russian official information sources that have reliable and up-to-date information,” the agency said in a statement.</p> <p>On Friday, Meta Platforms Inc.’s Facebook said it would block Russian state media from running ads or making money from ads shown on its platform, after Moscow said that it was restricting access to Facebook in the country.</p> <p>The most prominent argument being promoted by pro-government figures and media to justify the invasion is that Ukraine has the potential to revive its nuclear arsenal and intends to do so with the purpose of targeting Russia.</p> <p>On Friday, one morning broadcast in Russia presented charts showing what it said was Ukraine’s nuclear potential, including its ability to create what the presenter said was “the most primitive, but no less dangerous” so-called dirty bomb, or a conventional bomb that combines radioactive material.</p>

In 1994, three years after the demise of the Soviet Union, newly independent Ukraine agreed to give up its roughly 1,800 nuclear weapons, including short-range tactical weapons and air-launched cruise missiles, in exchange for security assurances from the U.S., the U.K. and Russia.

This week, Moscow seized on recent comments by Mr. Zelensky regarding Ukraine's decision to cede the nuclear weapons as evidence of the threat Kyiv poses to Russia.

Addressing the Munich Security Conference last weekend, Mr. Zelensky said today his country has neither those weapons, nor security for his country.

But he added, "We have something—the right to demand a shift from a policy of appeasement to ensuring security and peace guarantees."

Moscow charges that Ukraine wants nuclear weapons with the intention of attacking Russia. Mr. Putin has often said that Kyiv "has nuclear technologies created back in the Soviet times," specifying that some such weapons, including tactical missiles, have a range of over 100 kilometers, which is roughly 62 miles.

And "they can do more," the Russian president said in a televised address earlier this week. "It's only a matter of time."

"Ukraine intends to create its own nuclear weapons," he said, "and this isn't just bragging." If Kyiv is allowed to acquire "weapons of mass destruction, the situation in the world and in Europe will drastically change, especially for us, for Russia. We cannot but react to this real danger."

The Russian leader has also reminded Russians that their country is one of the most powerful nuclear nations in the world, warning that an attack on Russia would lead to defeat of any potential aggressor.

On Friday, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian responded, telling French radio that Mr. Putin "knows very well that NATO is also a nuclear alliance."

Nikolai Sokov, a senior fellow at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, worked for Russia's Foreign Ministry between 1987 and 1992 and handled the portfolio of nuclear weapons that remained out of Russia following the demise of the Soviet Union.

While Ukraine inherited a significant share of the USSR's nuclear arsenal, it didn't have launch control, Mr. Sokov said in an email. That was entrusted to Russia under two agreements brokered in 1991.

The last weapons that Kyiv inherited from the defunct Soviet state were withdrawn from Russia in 1996, and while Ukraine has a rich history of nuclear research and has deposits of uranium, "it has never had key elements of nuclear industrial infrastructure critical for building nuclear weapons," Mr. Sokov said.

Further, even keeping Soviet nuclear weapons "was de facto impossible," because they need regular maintenance, refurbishing and the replacement of components, Mr. Sokov said. Ukraine didn't have the capacity to dismantle nuclear weapons and didn't produce many of the essential components for replacement, he said.

Today, building the necessary industrial infrastructure would take years and massive spending, and would encounter major opposition from the West, the analyst added.

Rafael Loss, coordinator for pan-European data projects of the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank, said the transfer of nuclear material was completed in 2001 and since then Ukraine has been fulfilling all of its obligations as a nonnuclear weapon state under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

"International experts also do not consider Ukraine a likely proliferant," Mr. Loss said. "Putin's claims to the [contrary] are supposed to conjure up an imaginary threat that has no basis in reality."

It is “Russia that has modernized its vast nuclear arsenal in recent years [and] it has been the Kremlin that regularly threatens nuclear annihilation on countries that dare to stand up to Russia,” he added.

Russians like Elena Tarusova, 33, a mother of two from Bashkiria in the southwest part of Russia, said she supported the Kremlin’s military campaign, because it was “absolutely justified and necessary” to expel what she described as the “war criminals and henchmen of the West” leading Ukraine.

But some Russians are repudiating the state’s narrative defending Mr. Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine.

On Thursday, at least 170 Russian scientists and journalists signed an open letter, protesting the military offensive.

“This fatal step leads to huge human losses and undermines the foundations of the established system of international security,” the letter says. “The responsibility for unleashing a new war in Europe lies entirely with Russia. There is no rational justification for this war.”

Another antiwar petition, published on the Telegram messenger channel of Elena Chernenko, a journalist with the Kommersant daily business newspaper, had garnered almost 300 signatures by Saturday evening.

The petition led to Ms. Chernenko being expelled from the Russian Foreign Ministry journalists’ pool, she wrote on Telegram on Friday.

Also on Thursday, crowds of Russians took to the streets across the country to denounce the move, defying a continuing crackdown on political opposition that has markedly raised the risks of dissent and seen almost all prominent activists jailed or driven into exile.

OVD-Info, a group that monitors police detentions, said more than 2,440 people were detained across at least 58 cities for participating in what the authorities deemed as unauthorized gatherings on Thursday and Friday. Russia’s Interior Ministry didn’t respond to a request for information on the size of the protests but published that 600 people were detained in Moscow for joining the unsanctioned event on Thursday and didn’t respond to subsequent requests for information regarding protests on Friday.

Presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Friday that Russian citizens were allowed “have their own point of view,” but weren’t allowed to organize actions without “following the appropriate procedures.” In a published statement, the Interior Ministry urged residents to refrain from participating in further illegal demonstrations.

An antiwar petition on Change.org, entitled “No To War,” by Saturday evening had garnered almost 748,500 signatures.

“Putin ordered the start of a military operation against Ukraine, despite the terrible price that both Ukraine and Russia will undoubtedly pay for this war, despite all the voices of reason that sounded in Russia and beyond,” the petition said. “Official Russian rhetoric claims that this is done in self-defense. But history cannot be fooled,” it said.

Tatyana Pertseva, an independent film director in St. Petersburg, Russia’s second city, said Mr. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine made her uncomfortable.

“I am ashamed as a citizen of my country and I do not share this position,” she said. “Something is happening that should never be happening. All people must now unite in the struggle for peace.”

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HEADLINE	02/26 Russia energy dominance exposes reality
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-energy-dominance-ties-wests-hands-in-ukraine-war-11645884001

Western countries weighing how to sanction Russia over [the invasion of Ukraine](#) are up against the reality of its grip over Europe's energy supply.

Even as [sanctions are being imposed](#), the same countries doing the sanctioning are continuing to import a large proportion of their [energy from Russia](#) every day, which is in turn tying their hands in their ability to hit Moscow where it hurts most.

On Thursday, the European Union, U.K. and U.S. laid out sanctions that included measures to cut off Russia's government and Russian banks from international financial markets but didn't target oil and gas, which contribute around one-fifth of Russia's gross domestic product. Last year, Russia sold around \$100 billion worth of oil and gas to Europe, according to an estimate by William Jackson, chief emerging markets economist at Capital Economics.

The [sanctions introduced by the West so far](#) might reduce Russia's GDP growth by 1 to 2 percentage points this year, the equivalent of \$20 billion to \$35 billion, Mr. Jackson said, cautioning that there is a large amount of uncertainty around that estimate.

Russia's two premier fossil-fuel companies are often described as arms of the Russian state. The government and companies controlled by it own more than 50% of shares in [Gazprom](#) PJSC, the giant gas producer and exporter whose critics say it uses gas supplies as a geopolitical tool.

A government-owned company holds more than 40% of shares in [Rosneft Oil](#) Co., which describes itself as Russia's biggest taxpayer. The U.K.'s [BP](#) PLC holds another 20% in Rosneft but the British government is now [pressuring BP to unload its shares](#), according to a person familiar with the matter.

Russia is the world's largest natural-gas exporter and one of the top oil producers. A disruption in Russia's energy sales would have widespread repercussions for the global economy, from hurting European businesses and consumers to hurting [customers at the pump in the U.S.](#)

"The deep energy relationship between Europe and Russia, and Russia's significant position in the global oil market, is a major constraint on those who might otherwise want to impose even stricter sanctions," said Meghan O'Sullivan, the director of the Geopolitics of Energy Project at Harvard University's Kennedy School.

In the U.S., imports of Russian crude oil and petroleum products account for about 3% of U.S. oil demand. These have risen to records in recent years, in part because refiners sought alternatives to heavy Venezuelan crude oil subject to U.S. sanctions.

"I will do everything in my power to limit the pain the American people are feeling at the gas pump," President Biden said Thursday. "This is critical to me."

The EU is far more exposed, receiving around 40% of its gas imports from Russia, much of it through pipelines that run through Ukraine, and more than one-quarter of its oil.

So far, [the war](#) hasn't disrupted gas flows. A spokeswoman for the company that runs Ukraine's pipeline network said it was stable as of 11 a.m. local time Friday. Both Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) and Gazprom have said they would continue to supply European gas customers.

In fact, after [Russia attacked Ukraine](#) on Thursday and prices in the spot gas market rocketed, it became more profitable for European companies to max out the gas they import via Ukraine from Russia under long-term Gazprom contracts. This is because under these contracts buyers typically pay according to the level at which gas was trading a month ago, when prices were lower than they are now in the spot market.

As a result, more gas flowed west from Russia to Central Europe and beyond on Thursday and Friday than in the previous weeks.

Still, the [military campaign](#) raises the risk that pipelines that run through Ukraine could be damaged, interrupting the flow of gas. European governments also are concerned that Moscow could shut off the gas in retaliation for Western sanctions, analysts said. Gas prices soared on Thursday by one-third before slipping back Friday. They are about six times as high as a year ago.

If Russian gas is disrupted, the EU would have enough gas in storage and alternative suppliers to get it through the winter in the next month without significant disruptions, said Henning Gloystein, director for energy, climate and resources at risk consulting firm Eurasia. But it would need to spend the spring and summer refilling its inventories ahead of next winter, meaning that already high gas prices would stay elevated and fuel higher inflation, he said.

If Russian gas to Europe stops flowing entirely, “this would do severe damage to Europe’s economy and also undermine global growth,” Mr. Gloystein said.

Europe couldn’t replace all the gas it buys from Russia in a pinch. The bulk of any alternative supplies would come in the form of [liquefied natural gas](#). Georg Zachmann, a senior fellow at the Bruegel think tank, said that Europe could double LNG imports at huge expense because it would have to outbid other buyers such as Japan or persuade them to pivot to other fuels.

Coupled with other measures such as eking more gas out of Norwegian gas fields, Mr. Zachmann thinks Europe could replace half the gas it gets from Russia, leaving it with about 15% of current demand unmet.

“This would be super expensive and very complicated,” he said.

Additional measures could include rationing gas supplies, starting by slowing production at or closing industrial gas users while giving priority to heating and power generation. To offset rocketing prices, governments could introduce energy subsidies for the poor, though these would weigh on state budgets already stretched by costly pandemic support.

Without Russian gas, Germany and others might be forced to restart mothballed coal and oil power plants, though difficulties securing coal from Russia could make that problematic, said Energy Aspects analyst Trevor Sikorski.

The German economy ministry said that it is looking to phase out coal as soon as 2030 and that it wasn’t considering extending the life of the country’s last three nuclear power plants, which are set to shut down this year under the country’s 2011 nuclear phaseout initiative. A reactivation of nuclear power plants would face enormous political opposition in Berlin, including from the governing Green Party, which has opposition to nuclear energy as one of its founding principles.

In recent weeks, the Italian and Austrian governments have been meeting with leaders from Gulf states to expand energy deliveries.

In Bulgaria, the poorest EU member state, which gets around three-quarters of its gas from Russia, the government has said that it would try to expedite a linkage to Greece’s gas network and might be forced to curtail electricity exports if deliveries cease. The Netherlands is working on plans including the shutdown of major industrial gas users. Pumping more gas from the Groningen gas field, which is being wound down because it causes earthquakes, is a last resort, government officials have said.

In the longer term, European countries have ramped up plans to diversify away from Russia.

Germany, which gets over 50% of its gas via pipeline from Russia, currently has no LNG terminal of its own. This month, however, Economics Minister Robert Habeck said the government would support at least two new terminals, though these will take years to build and face high regulatory hurdles.

	<p>On Thursday, Mr. Habeck said that the government will create gas and coal reserves for the coming winter. Germany has no strategic gas reserves, with all gas storages now in the hands of companies that include Gazprom, which controls some of Europe’s largest gas storage sites.</p> <p>Germany’s gas reserves have recently dropped to a historic low of about 30%. The EU is drafting rules to force operators to keep reserves at a certain level.</p> <p>Getting more gas from North African producers like Algeria also is an option being explored in Europe. In theory, fracking is another, though it has faced considerable opposition due to environmental concerns.</p> <p>Germany banned fracking in 2016 for fear the chemicals in the process could contaminate water supplies, but has some natural reserves it could tap if it were to change its legislation—something that isn’t on the cards for now.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Western leaders misread Vladimir Putin
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-invaded-ukraine-west-misread-russia-11645822427
GIST	<p>Western powers and their allies have lined up to oppose Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. They can’t say he didn’t warn them.</p> <p>Fifteen years ago, the former KGB officer railed against U.S. domination of global affairs and assailed the post-Cold War security order as a threat to his country. In the years that followed, he grabbed portions of Georgia, annexed Crimea and sent troops into Ukraine’s Donbas region.</p> <p>Mr. Putin sent repeated signals that he intended to widen Russia’s sphere of influence and cast the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s eastward expansion as an existential threat to Moscow’s security. He made plain he viewed Ukraine as part of Russia.</p> <p>Yet until recently few Western leaders imagined Mr. Putin would go through with a full-scale invasion, having miscalculated his determination to use force—on a scale that recalls the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968—to restore Russian control over the nations on its periphery.</p> <p>Russian forces moved by air and land to attack Kyiv on Friday after launching an invasion Wednesday. A Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said Russia was ready for negotiations, but the goals of its combat operation to “demilitarize” Ukraine remained.</p> <p>“It was strategic narcissism and an associated failure to consider the emotion, ideology, and aspiration that drives Putin and the Siloviki around him,” said H.R. McMaster, the retired three-star Army general who served as former U.S. President Donald Trump’s national security adviser, referring to the small circle of hard-line advisers around the Russian president.</p> <p>Mr. Putin’s all-out assault on Ukraine has put the West on its back foot, where it is now struggling to find ways to deter the Kremlin’s aggression and to influence a Russian leader who has openly expressed disdain for the West and called into doubt its willingness to take decisive action.</p> <p>The costs of the West’s failure to deter Russia are now being borne by Ukraine, which for 14 years has existed in a strategic purgatory: marked for potential membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization but never admitted into the alliance and the security guarantees that it provided.</p> <p>Longer term, the invasion has ruptured the already chilly relations between the Western alliance and Moscow.</p> <p>When Mr. Putin’s forces invaded Georgia in 2008 after it was promised eventual NATO membership, and recognized two breakaway areas, the West reacted by temporarily suspending dialogue, before returning to business as usual. Sanctions imposed after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 also didn’t bite.</p>

In recent months, senior U.S. officials have laid out Mr. Putin's invasion plans. The misreading of Mr. Putin, however, cuts across multiple U.S. administrations.

Former President George W. Bush said he had looked into Mr. Putin's eyes and found him trustworthy. Former President Barack Obama dismissed Mr. Putin's Russia as a "regional power" threatening its neighbors out of weakness. Former President Donald Trump saw the U.S.'s European allies, and their reluctance to assume more of the burden for defense, as a bigger problem than putting the Kremlin on notice. President Biden sought to build a "stable, predictable" relationship with Mr. Putin with a summit meeting in June.

The attack exposes complacency in Europe, which allowed its military to shrink and did little to reduce its energy dependency on Russia, despite Moscow's increasingly aggressive behavior, which included cyberattacks on Western targets. Even as the West imposes sanctions on Russia, it is sending hundreds of millions of dollars daily to pay for Russian gas.

Western leaders took comfort in the limited nature of Mr. Putin's earlier military interventions. Those were considered deniable, smaller-scale operations that sought to mask the extent of Russia's role. Russian actions also included hacks on the Democratic National Committee in 2016 and cyber attacks on its neighbors. The U.S. and its allies neither marshaled the military and economic leverage to forestall his invasion of Ukraine nor presented a major diplomatic concession, such as halting NATO expansion.

"The West did not underestimate Russia's military capabilities. It watched the determined military modernization program since the Georgian war in 2008, and saw some of its fruits in the militarily successful intervention in Syria in 2015," said William Courtney, the former U.S. ambassador to Georgia and Kazakhstan during the Clinton administration. "But the West may have underestimated the Kremlin's willingness to use force in Europe, and against a people which Putin claims are one with Russians."

Mr. Putin's early cooperation with the West morphed into animosity over his two decades in power. The Russia he inherited had a broken bureaucracy and an economy the size of Belgium. Now he oversees a government and military fueled by years of high energy prices.

When Mr. Putin became president in 1999, he cut a very different figure from his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin. Mr. Yeltsin had a jovial, backslapping relationship in public with former President Bill Clinton. Mr. Putin was a closed book.

By the time Mr. Putin came to power—via the KGB and local politics in his native Saint Petersburg—Russia was inside the Group of Eight and was being consulted by NATO although staying outside the alliance.

In his early exchanges with Western leaders and new on the international scene, Mr. Putin appeared respectful.

Mr. Bush attempted to build a personal relationship with him. In their first meeting at a summit in Slovenia in June 2001, Mr. Bush said: "I looked the man in the eye and found him very straightforward and trustworthy... I was able to get a sense of his soul. He's a man who's deeply committed to his country and the best interests of his country."

After the Sept. 11 attacks, Mr. Putin was the first foreign leader to call Mr. Bush to offer condolences and cooperation in fighting terrorism.

He offered intelligence and logistical support to the U.S. as it invaded Afghanistan, over the heads of some in Russia's military establishment. Michael McFaul, who would later become an adviser to the Obama administration at the time praised the relationship as "another chance to really end the Cold War."

Thomas Graham, the senior National Security Council official for Russia affairs in the Bush administration, said that the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was the first of several events that Mr. Putin would have objected to if Russia carried more sway.

“Putin didn’t believe in these things but didn’t see much point in opposing them because the West was going to do them anyway,” Mr. Graham said. “He told people that he was not going to oppose them publicly because it would just make him look bad.”

Mr. Putin’s suspicions toward the West became more pronounced with the so-called colored revolutions beginning in 2004 that toppled leaders of former Soviet states, and later with the Arab Spring.

NATO had meanwhile continued its expansion to Eastern European countries that had been in the Soviet-aligned Warsaw Pact in 1999 and then in 2004, when the alliance was also enlarged to cover the three Baltic states that had been part of the Soviet Union. The U.S. and its allies saw enlargement as a way to encourage reform in the newly emerging democracies. NATO’s new members were looking to sit under the U.S. security umbrella should Russia threaten to absorb them again.

Mr. Putin’s anger over enlargement became clear in a speech he made at the annual Munich Security Conference in 2007, where he surprised his audience as he railed against the unipolar world dominated by the U.S. There he laid out his grievances against NATO expansion, leveling allegations of broken promises from the West that NATO wouldn’t shift eastward and depicting enlargement as a threat to Russia.

Enlargement “represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: Against whom is this expansion intended?” he said.

Tensions ratcheted up further a year later. Mr. Putin was invited to a NATO summit in Bucharest, where leaders were discussing a route into the alliance for Georgia and Ukraine. While Mr. Bush wanted the countries to be admitted in short order, France and Germany opposed the move.

In the end, a compromise allowed Georgia and Ukraine to eventually be admitted but with no date set.

The outcome turned out to be the worst of both worlds for the two countries. Hard-liners in Moscow had identified them as potential future adversaries—but ones that weren’t yet protected by the alliance’s security guarantees. “They got the hot breath of Russia on their necks while they didn’t get NATO membership,” said Jamie Shea, a senior NATO official at the time.

While in Bucharest, in a meeting with Mr. Bush, Mr. Putin told him that Ukraine wasn’t a real country, according to Western officials.

In August that year, Mr. Putin invaded Georgia, routing a U.S.-trained Georgian military. Western experts say the Russia learned from the military mishaps in that incursion and subsequently upgraded its equipment and shifted toward a professional, rather than a conscript, army.

When Mr. Obama visited Russia in 2009, he met Mr. Putin at his dacha. There, according to a memoir by the U.S. president, he received an “animated and seemingly endless monologue” on the slights Mr. Putin felt the U.S. had made, including expanding NATO and invading Iraq.

After Russian forces seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, Mr. Obama dismissed the development as the actions of a “regional power that is threatening some of its immediate neighbors, not out of strength but out of weakness.” The following year, after Russian forces intervened in Syria on President Bashar al-Assad’s behalf, U.S. officials played down the significance, saying it might even lead to a Russian quagmire.

Successive U.S. presidents sought to keep the possibility for cooperation amid the differences. Mr. Shea, the former NATO official, said in retrospect that the West should have acted earlier and more firmly.

“We should have imposed in my opinion the sanctions on Russia that we are imposing today either in 2008 or 2014, because then Putin might have got the message that the West would react vigorously and might have been deterred,” Mr. Shea said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, days before Russia launched war on his country, likened the West’s posture toward Russia to the mistakes of appeasement in the 20th century. He criticized Western nations for not imposing sanctions earlier. “What are you waiting for?” he said. “We don’t need sanctions after the bombardment begins.”

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HEADLINE	02/26 Ukraine president refuses US escape offer
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/26/ukraine-russian-strikes-pound-kyiv-as-zelenskiy-refuses-us-offer-to-evacuate
GIST	<p>Russian troops continued to press their offensive against Kyiv as well as other cities across Ukraine on Saturday, as residents sought shelter in the capital’s metro system and in basements during a third day of fierce bombardment.</p> <p>As Russian strikes continued to pound Kyiv, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, refused a US offer to evacuate, insisting he would stay. “The fight is here,” he said as street fighting continued, largely around the edges of the city.</p> <p>Zelenskiy also offered renewed assurance that the country’s military would stand up to the Russian invasion. In a video recorded in the street close to the government quarter, he said he remained in the city and that claims the Ukrainian military would put down arms were false.</p> <p>At a later press conference, he said: “We are successfully holding back the enemy’s attacks. We know we are defending our land and the future of our children. Kyiv and the key areas are controlled by our army.</p> <p>“The occupiers wanted to set up their puppet in our capital. They didn’t succeed. On our streets, there was a proper fight going on.”</p> <p>Ukraine’s health minister reported on Saturday that 198 people had been killed, including three children, and that more than 1,000 others had been wounded since the Russian offensive started before dawn on Thursday with massive air and missile strikes and troops forging into Ukraine from the north, east and south.</p> <p>Among the Kyiv buildings hit in the latest wave of Russian strikes was a high-rise residential building. Kyiv’s mayor, Vitali Klitschko, posted an image showing a gaping hole in one side of the building and ravaged apartments on several floors.</p> <p>“We are all scared and worried. We don’t know what to do then, what’s going to happen in a few days,” said Lucy Vashaka, 20, a worker at a small Kyiv hotel.</p> <p>An intelligence update by the UK’s defence ministry on Saturday said Russia had yet to gain control of airspace over Ukraine and that the majority of Russian forces were still about 18 miles from Kyiv.</p> <p>With Kyiv’s defenders fending off Russian attacks in the early hours of Saturday, there were reports of Ukrainian counterattacks in some places previously claimed by Russian forces, including Sumy in the country’s east.</p> <p>A resident in Kherson – which Russia claimed to have taken – who was reached by the Guardian by phone said that while Russian troops were in the city there was continuing fighting and the Ukrainian military had blown up a key bridge into the city.</p>

The Ukrainian military claimed to have shot down two Russian transport planes loaded with paratroopers, although this could not be confirmed and the Russian military did not comment on either plane.

There was evidence that in some areas Russian forces were facing mounting logistical difficulties, with Ukrainian-language social media accounts posting footage of captured Russian soldiers and reports of shortages of vehicle fuel and food for troops.

In a deeply ominous development, however, footage captured by CNN just across the Russian border in the Belgorod region showed a TOS-1 heavy flamethrower system, which fires thermobaric rockets, being moved on a flatbed truck towards the Ukrainian border.

The deployment came as the international criminal court's prosecutor has put combatants and their commanders on notice that he is monitoring Russia's invasion and has jurisdiction to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Ukraine appeared to be winning mounting diplomatic support for expelling Russia from the international Swift banking system, with the office of the Italian prime minister, Mario Draghi, saying it would support any EU move on sanctions and Cyprus, which has extensive banking links with Russia, indicating that it would no longer object to the move. A decision is expected within days.

"We already have almost full support from EU countries for disconnecting Russia from Swift. I hope that Germany and Hungary will have the courage to support this decision. We have the courage to defend our homeland, to defend Europe," Zelenskiy said on Saturday.

Estonia's prime minister, Kaja Kallas, said the country was banning Russian flights from its airspace, and France said it had decided to send defensive military equipment to Ukraine.

As large numbers of Ukrainians in the country's south and east have sought to flee, including into neighbouring Hungary and Poland, queues at some border crossings snaked back for 12 miles or more.

Evacuation trains were organised from cities, including Lviv, to help people leave. An estimated 120,000 people have fled, including 100,000 into Poland since Thursday.

The movement of Russian troops after less than three days of fighting further imperilled a country clinging to independence in the face of a broad assault, which threatened to topple Ukraine's democratic government and scramble the post-cold war world order.

Western officials believe Vladimir Putin is determined to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own. The invasion represents Putin's boldest effort yet to redraw the map of Europe and revive Moscow's cold war-era influence. It has triggered an international response including direct sanctions on Putin.

The US government urged Zelenskiy on Saturday to evacuate from Kyiv but he turned down the offer, according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation, saying he needed anti-tank ammunition but "not a ride".

The Russian invasion was anticipated for weeks by the US and western allies and was denied to be in the works for just as long by Putin.

Putin has not disclosed his ultimate plans for Ukraine. His foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, gave a hint, saying: "We want to allow the Ukrainian people to determine its own fate."

Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia recognised Zelenskiy as Ukraine's president, but he would not say how long the Russian military operation could last.

HEADLINE	02/25 Prominent Russians in protests against war
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/25/prominent-russians-join-protests-against-ukraine-war-amid-1800-arrests-putin
GIST	<p>Prominent Russians shocked by the invasion of Ukraine have gone public with their opposition to the war, despite the professional and personal risks that come with dissent on such a sensitive issue in Russia.</p> <p>More than 1,800 people were arrested at rallies across the country on Thursday night as prominent Russians from the worlds of entertainment, business and journalism have risked their livelihoods in order to speak out.</p> <p>When Elena Chernenko, the veteran diplomatic correspondent for Kommersant newspaper, found out that Russia was invading Ukraine, she said she was stunned.</p> <p>“Of course, I was shocked ... Until yesterday morning, I refused to believe that Russia could launch a massive military operation against Ukraine,” said Chernenko, who believed Russia may at most recognise the territories in south-east Ukraine.</p> <p>“I thought that all the talk about invasions was awful hysteria. I argued with people on Twitter and in person that nothing would happen, it’s all thought up,” she said. “Maybe I don’t understand anything about Russian foreign policy anymore.”</p> <p>After Putin announced the military operation, she penned an open letter condemning the attack on Ukraine. “War has never been and will never be a method of conflict resolution and there are no excuses for it,” she wrote. Nearly 300 journalists have signed, including representatives of state-run media.</p> <p>In retaliation, she revealed she has been expelled from the diplomatic pool, which she has covered for more than 11 years, for “unprofessionalism”.</p> <p>Chernenko remains a strong critic of Ukraine’s policy toward the Donbas region, but said she could not justify the kind of military operation now unfolding.</p> <p>“There was nothing complicated about it for me,” Chernenko said of her letter. “It was a spontaneous reaction. My country has started a military operation against another ... but we’re for diplomacy, we’re for the UN charter, moral values, brotherly nations, and all that. And I had the feeling that this is the wrong path.”</p> <p>Popular actors and musicians, some of whom are employed by the government, have also spoken out and appear to have been punished for their dissent.</p> <p>On Thursday, Ivan Urgant, the host of a popular talk show on state-run Channel One, posted a black square on Instagram with the caption “Fear and pain. No to war.” His show has not gone on air since. Channel One has claimed it is just a scheduling issue, although several reports in Russian media say that they have been blacklisted.</p> <p>Elena Kovalskaya, the director of the Meyerhold Center in Moscow, quit her job at the state-financed theatre in an act of protest over the war. “It’s impossible to work for a murderer and receive your salary from him,” she wrote of her decision.</p> <p>“Our future is being taken from us,” said Yuri Shevchuk, the frontman of classic Soviet rock band DDT and a veteran anti-war campaigner, who went to Chechnya in 1995 as part of a peace tour. “We’re being pulled like through an ice hole into the past, into the 19th, 18th, 17th centuries. And people refuse to accept it.”</p> <p>He pointed to those in show business who would usually avoid politics now coming out against the war. “Even those pop stars who never talked about politics, who were afraid to lose their shows, honorariums, and so on.”</p>

They include mainstream stars like Valery Meladze, as well as more politically minded artists like the rapper Oxxxymiron. He voluntarily cancelled six sold-out shows in Moscow and St Petersburg, writing: “I cannot entertain you when Russian missiles are falling on Ukraine.”

Even the family members of some of Russia’s richest businessmen have gone public in their opposition to war. The daughter of Roman Abramovich [posted an Instagram picture](#) that read “Putin wants a war with Ukraine,” crossing out the word Russia. “The biggest and most successful lie of Kremlin’s propaganda is that most Russian stand with Putin.”

And on Friday afternoon, Lisa Peskova, the daughter of Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, took to Instagram to post a simple message on a black background: #Нетвойне, or “No to war.” So did Tatyana Yumasheva, the daughter of Boris Yeltsin.

While the acts of dissent may not change Kremlin policy, they could point to significantly less public or elite support for the current military operation in Ukraine than the annexation of Crimea eight years ago.

Hours after Putin announced the military operation, protests broke out on the streets of Moscow and St Petersburg and more than 50 other Russian cities on Thursday evening.

They were not the largest protests that Moscow has ever seen. But they were remarkable as a show of defiance despite threats that the government would crack down harder than usual.

“Not only did they go to war without us, they won’t even let you protest against a war,” said Zhanna, a young woman with her hair dyed green, pointing to police in riot helmets. “But war is never right. I need to be here because I feel ashamed.”

One young man held up a sign that said “Fuck the war!” Within seconds, four police officers had fallen on top of him, dragging him roughly to a police van as media and photographers crowded around.

That scene repeated itself dozens of times, as protesters mostly waited their turn for police to arrest them. As the protesters were pushed off the square, they began to march down the broad pavement of Tverskaya Street, chanting “No to war.”

A number of protesters said that they wished more people had come out in opposition to the war, a remark echoed by political analysts.

“The government can put down nearly any protest at this point,” said Tatyana Stanovaya, the founder of R.Politik. “And in order for the situation to become serious, many more people would have to come out than did so yesterday.”

Despite the odds stacked against them, many Russians have said they feel it is their duty to speak out whatever the consequences.

“They are all doing this without worrying about their own future and threats,” said Dmitry Muratov, the Nobel prize-winning editor of Novaya Gazeta. “These people have all spoken very clearly to say that they are against this bloodshed. And that is very inspiring for me.”

Muratov released dual editions of his newspaper in both Russian and Ukrainian this week and has said that his newspaper would defy the Russian media watchdog’s rules that they only report official government information about the war, trusting reporting only from their own newsroom.

He believes the war is an unpopular one for most Russians.

	“The memory of the [second world] war, and that people have relatives in Ukraine, and that Ukraine is a dear country to us, it holds back even the most rabid supporters of the current leadership,” said Muratov. “There is no enthusiasm for this.”
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HEADLINE	02/25 China ponders Russia reshape world order
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/25/china-ponders-how-russia-actions-ukraine-reshape-world-order
GIST	<p>The news came as a surprise to many in Beijing. Barely 24 hours ago, Chinese pundits predicted that a war in Ukraine was not inevitable. In New York, as Russia geared up for a full-on assault on its neighbour, China’s UN envoy, Zhang Jun, urged in a security council meeting that “the door to a peaceful solution to the Ukraine issue is not fully shut, nor should it be shut”.</p> <p>But when people in Kyiv woke up to sound of bombs in what the Nato chief called a “deliberate, cold-blooded” invasion, the door had clearly been closed. China’s state media, however, insisted it was a “special military action” by Russia. Quoting Vladimir Putin, China’s central television tweeted: “Russia was left with no other choice.”</p> <p>Chinese netizens were fascinated by Russia’s move. Three weeks ago, Putin was the guest of honour at the Beijing Winter Olympics. On 4 February, he and Xi Jinping pledged that there would be “no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation” in their bilateral relationship. On Thursday, millions took to the social media site Weibo to discuss it. So much so, a new phrase was coined: <i>Wu Xin Gong Zuo</i> (乌心工作) to describe those who were so concerned with the situation in Ukraine they could not focus on work.</p> <p>The reality on the ground contrasted with the official Chinese media narrative, yet it also offered a glimpse into the tightrope Beijing is walking. On Thursday, as she refused to use the word “invasion” to describe Russia’s action, the foreign ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying, also indicated that China would not provide arms to Russia. “I believe that as a strong country, Russia doesn’t need China or other countries to provide weapons to it,” she said.</p> <p>In his call with Putin on Friday, Xi reiterated that China “respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations” and called for negotiations to resolve the issue. According to the Kremlin, Xi told Putin that he “respects” Russia’s actions. Putin, according to a Chinese readout, said he was “willing to conduct high-level talks with Ukraine”.</p> <p>Bonny Lin, the director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC, said “Besides China’s effort to balance its various goals, all indications point to the fact that China prioritises its relationship with Russia at the moment,” adding that Moscow’s action also posed a problem for Beijing.</p> <p>In public, Beijing advocates the position that sovereignty is sacrosanct. This is a discourse it often deploys when it talks about Taiwan, which it regards as a breakaway province.</p> <p>On the other hand, the Ukraine crisis offers Beijing the opportunity to express grievances against its common adversaries with Russia: the US and Nato. So far, the latter appears to be weighing heavier in Beijing’s messaging.</p> <p>This explains why Hua on Thursday invoked the memories of a diplomatic incident from more than 20 years ago. On 7 May 1999, Nato missiles struck the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and set it ablaze in a predawn strike, killing three Chinese nationals. The US claimed it was a “mistake” caused by an out-of-date map, but China was never convinced.</p> <p>“Chinese elites operate in a way that political gains can be prioritised over economic gains,” according to Zeno Leoni, a defence expert at King’s College London. “Right now China’s political goal is to weaken</p>

the US-led liberal order. This means that it could accept some economic disruption and continue to publicly support Russia – a marriage of convenience – for the sake of a political objective.”

Lin noted the further escalation of events was likely to worsen China’s relationship with the US and the EU and push countries such as Japan and Australia further away from China. “In the near term, China will be impacted by secondary sanctions and these costs for China will likely increase as the situation in Ukraine deteriorates.”

In unveiling the latest round of sanctions on Thursday, Joe Biden took a swipe at Beijing, saying any country that backed Russia’s onslaught in Ukraine would be “stained by association”. “Putin will be a pariah on the international stage,” he declared.

For now, Beijing’s mixed tactics appear to have already exposed the limit of its initial approach. On Thursday, China announced it was fully open to Russian wheat imports. But 24 hours later, reports showed that at least two of China’s biggest state-owned banks were restricting financing for purchases of Russian commodities.

Leoni said that if military tensions were to escalate across Europe – where China has major economic interests – Beijing’s attitude might still change. “We have seen recently how both Nato’s and Russia’s naval assets have been positioning or involved in trainings in the Mediterranean Sea: Beijing might change its calculus about Russia should military hostilities extend, even mildly, to this region where the bulk of China’s trade with Europe travels through.”

Western leaders are alarmed by Beijing’s response as they see the implications for the US-led postwar world order being fundamentally reshaped as a result of Russia’s action. “What we need to make sure in our response today is that we don’t just have a tactical response ... But we have a long-term response to the threat to the democratic order,” Jeremy Hunt, a former British foreign secretary, told BBC Radio 4.

“There are now two very big powers, Russia and China, that are absolutely committed to upending that order. And that is why we have to think long and hard and smart about what to do next.”

Beijing is aware of the diplomatic fallout such a response would cause. But a government researcher, who wished to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the matter, quipped: “Even if China joined the west in sanctioning Russia or criticising Russia, will the US-China relations improve?”

“We don’t want to face such a difficult choice, either,” he added, admitting Beijing’s dilemma but insisting its policy had to be pragmatic. “After all, China and Russia share a 4,000km-long border. In the long run, China has to be on good terms with Russia.”

To realist Chinese foreign policy thinkers, geography and history continue to be relevant in their reasoning of the new world order. The deadly Soviet-China border conflict in 1969 still casts a shadow for Beijing particularly as Biden frames America’s China challenge as “democracy v autocracy”.

“We are in the middle of massive changes [in geopolitics] and if you look around, many countries have been adventurous in recent years. For China, it is an opportunity as well as a challenge,” the Beijing-based government researcher said. “Adding the pandemic factor, it’s going to be very chaotic in the years to come.”

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HEADLINE	02/15 Seattle mortgage rates up 35% since 2021
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/local/seattlenews/article/Seattle-mortgage-rates-up-35-percent-16945582.php
GIST	Mortgage prices for the typical U.S. home have soared to an all-time high, surpassing a previous record set in the summer of 2006, according to a new report from Zillow. Seattle homeowners are not immune. The report said that monthly mortgage payments in the city have risen 35% since January of last year. That increase has resulted in homeowners paying an average of \$675

more per month, bringing the average monthly mortgage payment in Seattle to a whopping \$2,615.

Zillow analysts say these skyrocketing costs could impact prospective buyers in several ways.

“This is likely to push buyers to seek out lower-priced homes, whether that means [buying] smaller homes or condos, [moving] to more affordable neighborhoods, or even pulling up stakes and moving to a more affordable region,” Zillow spokesperson Alex Lacter said in an email. “For others, it might mean delaying a home purchase altogether, whether to save for a bigger down payment or hoping rates will fall.”

Lacter also said such costs could worsen the ongoing shortage of available homes.

“This also may deepen the inventory drought if existing homeowners who bought or refinanced at rates below 3% decide to hunker down for now, rather than pay more in interest to trade up in today’s conditions,” he said.

The coronavirus pandemic drove mortgage rates to an all-time low, and there are several reasons they’re again on the rise. Those include a rebounding economy; high inflation; a sharp rise in the 10-year Treasury yield, which is closely tied 30-year mortgage rates; and reports from the Federal Reserve that say several interest rate hikes are imminent.

The Zillow report said an average U.S. buyer could have expected to pay \$855 per month if they purchased a home in January 2021 with a 20% down payment and 30-year, fixed mortgage rate. But if they made that same purchase last month, analysts say, they would be paying \$1,162 per month. The report said that 31% increase in the buyer’s monthly payment, wrought by rising home costs and higher mortgage rates, is the highest increase on record.

This all means Seattle residents could be in for a one-two punch if they’re looking to buy a home. Housing costs alone have risen 23% in the city since last year, Lacter said. Buying a home for \$733,600 — the average home price in Seattle — and paying it off during a time of record-high monthly mortgage rates is likely not feasible for many, especially first-time buyers.

Steep mortgage rates are the latest twist in Seattle’s increasingly expensive housing market. [A recent report from Zumper](#) found that rent costs for one- and two-bedroom apartments experienced regular month-over-month increases in 2021, resulting in high year-over-year increases. Between January 2021 and last month, average rent prices for one-bedroom apartments in the city jumped 26.5%, while the average rent price for a two-bedroom apartment increased by 26%.

These trends indicate that Seattle’s housing market, which turned red-hot last year, shows no signs of cooling so far in 2022.

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HEADLINE	02/26 No end in sight Seattle-area concrete strike
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/no-end-in-sight-for-seattle-area-concrete-strike-heres-the-sticking-point/
GIST	<p>Local concrete companies and the union representing striking mixer drivers met for a 12-hour mediation session this week and once again failed to reach a deal to end the three-month work stoppage that has slowed construction projects in and around Seattle.</p> <p>In terse statements Thursday and Friday, the two sides revealed more details of their competing offers than they have so far. Wage increases remain the primary sticking point, and the two sides appear far apart.</p> <p>Mixer drivers have called for higher pay as the building industry booms and costs of living in the Seattle area skyrocket. Their employers say they’ve offered generous wage increases. Neither side has released full details of their competing offers.</p>

	<p>The top hourly pay rate for drivers today is about \$37 an hour, according to the union. Drivers make more on taxpayer-funded job sites. The wage on a King County project starting today would be \$69.95 an hour, including wages and benefits, according to the Washington Department of Labor & Industries.</p> <p>The companies previously said they offered a wage bump of 17.6%, about \$2.20 per hour each year of the three-year deal.</p> <p>This week, the companies upped that to an 18% increase. According to the union, the new offer added 15 cents in wages over three years.</p> <p>The union offered a one-year deal with a 10.6% wage increase, as well as an unspecified ratification bonus that would have cost the six firms “more than \$1.5 million,” which was “obviously unacceptable,” the companies said.</p> <p>According to Teamsters Local 174, the union’s proposal was a “good-faith offer” that did not include an improved retiree medical plan the companies have objected to. That offer would have “put workers back in trucks immediately while negotiations continue on a full-term contract,” the union said.</p> <p>The union said its members would continue to strike. “Clearly, these employers are not willing to accept anything other than complete domination of the hardworking men and women who do the work and earn them their fortunes,” Teamsters Local 174 Secretary-Treasurer Rick Hicks said in a statement.</p> <p>The companies said in a statement they “maintain their commitment to the mediation process.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Sound Transit reduces bus service
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/staffing-shortages-lead-sound-transit-to-reduce-bus-service/
GIST	<p>A host of Sound Transit bus lines will see reduced service starting in March because of ongoing driver shortages plaguing the entire industry, the transit agency said Friday.</p> <p>At the same time, Sound Transit will restore four trips on the S Line of its Sounder train — two departing from Seattle and two from Tacoma.</p> <p>Light-rail service will not be affected.</p> <p>The reduction in bus service is a step in the opposite direction from what Sound Transit board members had hoped to see. In the fall, board members approved service increases beginning in March. But with drivers in short supply, that will no longer happen.</p> <p>“Changing pandemic conditions and broad employment trends have since resulted in nationwide transit operator shortages, requiring some ST Express trip cancellations and route suspensions,” the agency said in a release Friday.</p> <p>Eight bus routes will see reduced service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 510 between Everett and Seattle • 511 between Ash Way and Northgate • 512 between Everett and Northgate • 532 between Everett and Bellevue • 535 between Lynnwood and Bellevue <p>The 545 and 550 routes, which run between Seattle and Redmond and Bellevue, respectively, will see wait times between arrivals extended to 10 minutes, up from eight minutes. And the 522 line between Woodinville and Roosevelt will no longer stop at the Green Lake Park-and-Ride at 65th Street.</p>

	<p>Several other lines will see minor adjustments.</p> <p>Transit ridership across Washington remains depressed when compared with pre-pandemic levels, down 38% from 2019. Across Sound Transit's trains and buses, ridership in December was just over 2 million people. It was about 4 million in February 2020.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Study: 5M kids' caregiver lost to pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/25/us/children-parents-caregiver-covid-deaths.html
GIST	<p>A new study estimates that at least 5.2 million children around the world lost a parent or other caregiver to Covid-19 in the first 19 months of the pandemic.</p> <p>“Children are suffering immensely now and need our help,” said Susan Hillis, a senior researcher at the University of Oxford and a lead author of the study, which was published in the medical journal The Lancet on Thursday.</p> <p>The study was based on data from 20 countries, including India, the United States and Peru, and was completed by an international research team that included experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization and several colleges and universities.</p> <p>It warns that a child who loses a parent or a caregiver could suffer negative effects including an increased risk of poverty, sexual abuse, mental health challenges and severe stress.</p> <p>An earlier study, focused on the first 13 months of the pandemic, arrived at an estimate of 1.5 million affected children. The new figure is much higher not just because it adds data for six more months, researchers say, but also because the first estimate was a significant undercount. Using updated figures on Covid-related deaths, the researchers now calculate that at least 2.7 million children lost a parent or caregiver during the first 13 months.</p> <p>The new study covers data through October 2021, and does not include the latest surge in cases from the Omicron variant, which have undoubtedly added to the toll.</p> <p>“It took 10 years for five million children to be orphaned by H.I.V./AIDS, whereas the same number of children have been orphaned by Covid-19 in just two years,” Lorraine Sherr, a professor of psychology at University College London and an author of the study, said in a statement.</p> <p>Davyon Johnson, 11, from Muskogee, Okla., is one of the millions of children to have lost a parent — in his case, his father, Willie James Logan, who died two days after being hospitalized with Covid in August 2021.</p> <p>“It’s been a rocky road, I’ll say it like that,” Davyon’s mother, LaToya Johnson, said in an interview.</p> <p>Davyon has dealt with the grief as best as he can, she said. His grades are still strong. He’s still eager to see friends. Still, there are days when they are both exhausted.</p> <p>“Up and down — up and down,” Ms. Johnson said of their emotions. “It’s him wanting to call his daddy and not being able to.”</p> <p>Darcey Merritt, a professor of child welfare at New York University who was not involved in the study, said the deaths of parents and caregivers would have a “long, far-reaching impact” on children, especially those in lower-income households.</p> <p>Children of color in the United States, she added, are particularly at risk of negative consequences.</p>

	<p>A study in the journal Pediatrics last year found that in the United States, one in every 168 American Indian or Alaska Native children, one in every 310 Black children, one in every 412 Hispanic children, and one in every 612 Asian children had lost a caregiver, compared with one in 753 white children.</p> <p>The study in The Lancet found that two out of three children orphaned are between 10 and 17, and a majority of the children who lost a parent lost their father.</p> <p>Juliette Unwin, a lead author of the study from Imperial College London, said in a statement that as the researchers receive more data, they expected the figures to grow “10 times higher than what is currently being reported.”</p> <p>“The pandemic is still raging worldwide,” Dr. Unwin said, “which means Covid-19-related orphanhood will also continue to surge.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 WA public-option health insurance plan
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/whats-working-and-not-in-washingtons-pioneering-public-option-health-insurance-plan/
GIST	<p>With prospects dim for the U.S. to adopt a single-payer “Medicare for All” program, health care reform advocates turned instead to an insurance plan designed by the government that could compete with private insurance plans sold on the health care exchanges. The idea behind this “public option” is that it could ultimately expand health care access by making a lower-cost plan available to consumers.</p> <p>But that public-option plan, though backed by Presidents Joe Biden and Barack Obama, also has gone nowhere because of political opposition in Congress.</p> <p>Some states have picked up the banner and are creating their own public-option plans. But they, too, are facing formidable opposition from the health care establishment, which is resisting the pressure to reduce costs on the back end so that consumers can pay less.</p> <p>Washington state, in its second year of offering the nation’s first public-option health insurance plan, has learned an important lesson: If you want hospitals to participate, you’re probably going to have to force them.</p> <p>The Washington public option is more of a public-private partnership: The plan was designed by the state but is offered by private insurance companies. Anyone buying their own policy on the state’s health insurance marketplace can sign up for a public-option plan and, depending on their income, may receive significant subsidies from the federal government to lower its cost. But two years in, the plans are available in only 25 of the state’s 39 counties, enrollment numbers have been underwhelming, and state leaders blame hospitals.</p> <p>“The plans had a hard time getting networks put together because the hospitals wouldn’t play,” said state Rep. Eileen Cody, the Washington legislator who introduced the public-option bill in 2019. “They’re a big part of the problem.”</p> <p>Officials from the Washington State Hospital Association said that more hospitals than not are voluntarily participating in public-option plans. But, they noted, the public option relies on cutting payments to hospitals to control costs and ties reimbursement to Medicare rates, which don’t cover hospitals’ cost of providing care.</p> <p>“If patients opt to join a public-option plan rather than private insurance, over time it could create financial challenges, especially for small, rural providers operating on thin margins,” said Chelene Whiteaker, senior vice president of government affairs for the hospital group.</p>

State legislators last year voted to mandate that hospitals contract with a public-option plan if public-option plans weren't available in each county in 2022. That mandate will go into effect for 2023.

Now, other states looking at a public option are learning from Washington's challenges. Colorado and Nevada, which are implementing public-option plans for 2023 and 2026, respectively, have already incorporated ways of forcing hospitals to participate. And other states considering a public option — including Connecticut, Oregon, New Jersey and New Mexico — are likely to follow suit.

"One thing that the states have learned is you cannot make it optional for hospitals to participate," said Erin Fuse Brown, director of the Center for Law, Health & Society at Georgia State College of Law. "Otherwise, there's just no way for the public option to have a chance. It will never build a sufficient network."

Washington's public option was designed to save consumers money primarily by lowering what hospitals and doctors get paid, capping aggregate payments at 160% of what Medicare would pay for those services. By comparison, health plans had been paying providers an average of 174% of Medicare rates.

Public-option plans are available to anyone and come in the same gold, silver, and bronze tiers as private plans on the health insurance exchange. Proponents estimated the cap would result in public-option plans having premiums 5% to 10% lower than traditional plans on the exchange. But public-option premiums were, on average, 11% higher than the lowest silver plan premium available in each county on the marketplace in 2021, and a public-option plan was the silver plan with the lowest premium in just nine counties. Silver plans cover, on average, about 70% of health care costs. Only 1% of people buying plans on the exchange chose public-option plans in 2021.

Public-option premiums for 2022 came in about 5% lower than public-option premiums in 2021. This year's enrollment numbers have not been finalized — the state is waiting to see how many of the people who signed up complete the process by paying their premiums.

"We know premiums are what drive decision-making in terms of enrollment," said Liz Hagan, director of policy solutions for United States of Care, a nonprofit that advocates for improving health care access. "People often don't look at anything other than the premium. They rarely look at the out-of-pocket costs."

But exchange officials say that savvy consumers are finding that the public-option plans are less expensive in the long run. Compared with traditional exchange plans, they have lower deductibles and provide more services not subject to the deductible.

"Premium is still king," said Michael Marchand, chief marketing officer for the Washington Health Benefit Exchange. "But we have a lot of people who have gotten a lot smarter about how they're pricing out something."

Marchand also said it may take a few years for a new product like the public-option plan to gain traction in the marketplace. Insurance companies may have priced their plans a little high in the first year, not knowing what to expect. Now, with a year under their belt, they have lowered premiums somewhat.

Washington's stumble out of the gate reflects the difficulty of lowering health care costs while working within the current system. Legislators originally wanted to cut payment rates to hospitals and other providers much more, but they raised the cap in the legislation so hospitals wouldn't oppose the bill. Now, it's unclear whether the payment cap is low enough to reduce premiums.

"That's kind of the big trade-off," said Aditi Sen, a health economist with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "You are trying to lower premiums enough that people will enroll, but not so much that providers won't participate."

That will be a challenge for any state or federal public-option plan. There are only so many ways to lower premiums. Hospitals, doctors and other health care professionals have pushed back hard against any cuts in their payment rates, while insurance plans balk at plans that could eat into their profits.

Plans can reduce the size of their provider network to save money, but consumers dislike plans that limit what doctor they can see. Public-options plans could rely on existing public health programs, like Medicare and Medicaid, which already pay lower rates than commercial insurance, but government-run insurance plans carry negative connotations for many consumers.

Sen and her colleagues found that in 2021, Washington counties with public-option plans were primarily in areas where hospital and physician payment rates were lower than those in other parts of the state. That may have helped insurers build out networks and still stay under the 160% provider payment cap.

Five of the 12 private insurers that sell plans on the exchange offer public-option plans.

Insurance companies that had previously offered plans in Washington were able to cobble together networks based on existing contracts with hospitals and physician groups. But two carriers new to the Washington exchange had to start from scratch and negotiate prices with providers for their public-option plans. Some of the insurance companies tried to offer public-option plans in other counties but could not persuade hospitals, particularly those in larger hospital systems, to accept their rates.

Washington saw enrollment in public-option plans start to climb during a special enrollment period launched in mid-2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The American Rescue Plan Act also provided more subsidies, which made all plans on the exchange more affordable. But those subsidies are due to expire at the end of the year unless Congress votes to extend them. An extension is included in the Biden administration's Build Back Better legislation, but it has stalled in Congress.

Washington legislators approved other moves to make the public option more affordable. They set aside \$50 million in state subsidies, but officials must still determine how to allocate those funds. And lawmakers authorized the state to pursue a waiver with the federal government that could allow the state to keep more of the savings achieved through premium reductions. Currently, lower premiums also mean lower subsidies from the federal government. The state can request those savings be passed through to consumers.

Washington did not pursue such a waiver before implementing its public-option plan, but many believe the Biden administration might be more amenable to such a request than the Trump administration.

State progress on public-option plans comes amid disappointment among many progressives that Congress did not implement a federal public option under the Affordable Care Act to compete with private plans on the marketplaces.

Washington state officials realize that because they were the first to implement a public option, other states will be watching them closely to see how it all plays out. "We're not the only ones, but we're the furthest along," Cody said. "Other people can learn from our mistakes."

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HEADLINE	02/25 WSP: Steven Pass illegal parking get towed
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/wsp-says-nearly-100-cars-parked-illegally-stevens-pass-over-weekend/2D7325DNKVC4NFOMGCV6GIWLFA/
GIST	<p>STEVENS PASS, Wash. — Washington State Patrol says it had to step in and call tow trucks this past weekend after nearly 100 cars were abandoned on the side of Highway 2.</p> <p>Troopers estimate at one point Sunday morning, as many as 100 cars were abandoned in the shoulder.</p> <p>State Patrol said it was a severe safety hazard, so they began to tow.</p>

	<p>According to troopers, people started sprinting down Highway 2 trying to reach their illegally parked cars before the tow trucks could get to them.</p> <p>Backup at the summit is to be expected on weekends but this number of illegally parked cars is unprecedented.</p> <p>“I know how frustrating traffic and parking can be up here, especially on weekends. Part of the problem is that Highway 2 isn’t exclusively for skiers - it’s a major state artery,” Stevens Pass general manager Tom Fortune said.</p> <p>Parking has been a complain throughout the winter season, as have lift lines and staffing at the Vail-owned resort.</p> <p>Passholders that KIRO 7’s Lauren Donovan talked to said management needs to do a better job of updating their website in real time.</p> <p>Stevens Pass says the best place to get parking and terrain update is this Twitter page.</p> <p>Management also said they’re looking into shuttles, reservations and lot expansions.</p> <p>They also just hired a base operations director who will be devoted to making parking improvements.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 CDC: healthy can take break from masks
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-87d7bdc811ba6521e32017072d5ea180
GIST	<p>Most Americans live in places where healthy people, including students in schools, can safely take a break from wearing masks under new U.S. guidelines released Friday.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention outlined the new set of measures for communities where COVID-19 is easing its grip, with less of a focus on positive test results and more on what’s happening at hospitals.</p> <p>The new system greatly changes the look of the CDC’s risk map and puts more than 70% of the U.S. population in counties where the coronavirus is posing a low or medium threat to hospitals. Those are the people who can stop wearing masks, the agency said.</p> <p>The agency is still advising people, including schoolchildren, to wear masks where the risk of COVID-19 is high. That’s the situation in about 37% of U.S. counties, where about 28% of Americans live.</p> <p>The new recommendations do not change the requirement to wear masks on public transportation and indoors in airports, train stations and bus stations. The CDC guidelines for other indoor spaces aren’t binding, meaning cities and institutions even in areas of low risk may set their own rules. And the agency says people with COVID-19 symptoms or who test positive shouldn’t stop wearing masks.</p> <p>But with protection from immunity rising — both from vaccination and infection — the overall risk of severe disease is now generally lower, the CDC said.</p> <p>“Anybody is certainly welcome to wear a mask at any time if they feel safer wearing a mask,” CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a news briefing. “We want to make sure our hospitals are OK and people are not coming in with severe disease. ... Anyone can go to the CDC website, find out the volume of disease in their community and make that decision.”</p>

Some states, including Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey, are at low to medium risk while others such as West Virginia, Kentucky, Florida and Arizona still have wide areas at high levels of concern.

CDC's previous transmission-prevention guidance to communities focused on two measures — the rate of new COVID-19 cases and the percentage of positive test results over the previous week.

Based on those measures, agency officials advised people to wear masks indoors in counties where spread of the virus was deemed substantial or high. As of this week, more than 3,000 of the nation's more than 3,200 counties — greater than 95% — were listed as having substantial or high transmission under those measures.

That guidance has increasingly been ignored, however, with states, cities, counties and school districts across the U.S. announcing plans to drop mask mandates amid declining COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

With many Americans already taking off their masks, the CDC's shift won't make much practical difference for now, said Andrew Noymer, a public health professor at the University of California, Irvine. But it will help when the next wave of infection — a likelihood in the fall or winter — starts threatening hospital capacity again, he said.

"There will be more waves of COVID. And so I think it makes sense to give people a break from masking," Noymer said. "If we have continual masking orders, they might become a total joke by the time we really need them again."

The CDC is offering a color-coded map — with counties designated as orange, yellow or green — to help guide local officials and residents. In green counties, local officials can drop any indoor masking rules. Yellow means people at high risk for severe disease should be cautious. Orange designates places where the CDC suggests masking should be universal.

How a county comes to be designated green, yellow or orange will depend on its rate of new COVID-19 hospital admissions, the share of staffed hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients and the rate of new cases in the community.

Taking hospital data into account has turned some counties — such as Boulder County, Colorado — from high risk to low.

Mask requirements already have ended in most of the U.S. in recent weeks. Los Angeles on Friday began allowing people to remove their masks while indoors if they are vaccinated, and indoor mask mandates in Washington state and Oregon will be lifted in late March.

In a sign of the political divisions over masks, Florida's governor on Thursday announced new recommendations called "Buck the CDC" that actually discourage mask wearing.

In Pennsylvania, acting health secretary Keara Klinepeter urged "patience and grace" for people who choose to continue masking in public, including those with weakened immune systems. She said she'll keep wearing a mask because she's pregnant.

State health officials are generally pleased with the new guidance and "excited with how this is being rolled out," said Dr. Marcus Plescia of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

"This is the way we need to go. I think this is taking us forward with a new direction going on in the pandemic," Plescia said. "But we're still focusing on safety. We're still focusing on preventing death and illness."

	<p>The CDC said the new system will be useful in predicting future surges and urged communities with wastewater surveillance systems to use that data too.</p> <p>“If or when new variants emerge or the virus surges, we have more ways to protect ourselves and our communities than ever before,” Walensky said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 King Co. keeps indoor masks until March
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/king-county-anticipates-lifting-indoor-mask-mandate-on-march-21-if-covid-trends-continue
GIST	<p>King County's lead public health official said he anticipates the county will lift its indoor mask mandate in late March if the COVID-19 cases continue to trend downward.</p> <p>Dr. Jeff Duchin, Health Officer for Seattle & King County, said in a written statement Friday King County is poised to lift its indoor mask mandate March 21, the same day Washington state announced it is dropping the statewide mandate.</p> <p>Duchin said King County “is now considered to be at a “low COVID-19 community level,” according to CDC's new classification methods.</p> <p>Here is Duchin's full statement:</p> <p><i>King County is now considered to be at a “low COVID-19 community level” according to CDC's new classification method. This is a reflection of our recent falling hospitalization and case numbers after the Omicron surge, and a reflection of the actions King County residents have taken to protect themselves and others, most importantly through vaccination. If these trends hold or even better, improve through early March we anticipate lifting the King County indoor mask mandate on March 21st when the Washington state mandate lifts.</i></p> <p><i>King County being classified at a “low COVID-19 community level” on CDC’s framework does not mean COVID is over. A layered approach to prevention remains important, particularly to help protect those at higher risk of severe illness. This means staying up to date on vaccination and boosters, improving indoor air quality through ventilation and filtration, and, for high-risk persons especially, masking and limiting time in crowded and poorly ventilated indoor spaces. Employers should continue to support their staff in getting vaccinated and staying home when sick. In addition to those at increased risk, anyone who wants to lower their risk of COVID-19 for any reason may choose to continue to mask in certain settings And, we all need to be able to employ layered prevention measures when COVID-19 risk increases.</i></p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 CDC new guidelines but WA keeps mandate
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/new-cdc-guidelines-suggest-most-of-state-can-go-maskless-challenging-governors-indoor-mask-requirement
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON - The Centers for Disease Control released new guidance on mask-wearing on Friday, and it suggests that the majority of Washingtonians can go maskless right now. Gov. Jay Inslee previously said he will keep the indoor mask requirement in effect until March 21.</p> <p>However, following the CDC announcement, Inslee's office said, "We have not had a chance to review the new guidance. Once that has happened, there will be a broader discussion with the governor’s office and the Department of Health about its implications for our state."</p> <p>Using a series of metrics based on a community’s hospital capacity and the rate of new COVID hospitalizations, the CDC came up with a simple-to-understand color code system for each county in the country.</p> <p>Green means a low impact on the area’s healthcare system and low levels of severe disease. Yellow means some impact on the healthcare system and more people with severe disease.</p>

Orange is a high potential for healthcare system strain and a high level of severe disease. The CDC is also suggesting everyone in an orange county wears a mask in public indoor settings including schools.

The CDC says people may choose to wear a mask at any time but those with symptoms, a positive test or exposure to COVID should wear a mask.

Okanogan, Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Pierce, Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, Jefferson and Clallam have all been [labeled as orange by the CDC](#).

When asked before the [CDC released its new guidance](#), the Governor's Press Secretary that the March 21 lifting will stay in place.

"COVID trends are declining, but still remain very high relative to other waves over the pandemic," Deputy Communications Director Mike Faulk told FOX 13.

"I think the governor should follow the CDC advice," said Republican House Minority Leader JT Wilcox. Sixty percent of the state's 39 counties have a majority of Republican voters. In many of those areas, people have not been following the governor's mask mandates for some time.

Wilcox says the Governor talks about following the science to make policy decisions. He says he should follow the advice of the scientists at the CDC.

"We have to assume he is following the science and I think it's time to tell people in the state, at least for now, all of this stress is over," says Wilcox.

One of the factors the Governor has set up as a key metric to lifting the indoor mask requirement is the seven-day average of new COVID hospitalizations per 100,000 people.

During his Feb.17 announcement, Inslee said he wanted that metric to be down to 5 people per 100,000 by March 21. The metric has been trending downward. The last reported number was 79 per 100,000 on Feb. 22.

The CDC is still advising that people, including schoolchildren, [wear masks where the risk of COVID-19 is high](#). The new recommendations don't change the requirement to wear masks on public transportation.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	02/28 Toyota investigates potential cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/toyota-suspends-all-domestic-factory-operations-after-suspected-cyber-attack-2022-02-28/
GIST	<p>TOKYO, Feb 28 (Reuters) - Toyota Motor Corp (7203.T) said it will suspend all domestic factory operations on Tuesday losing around 13,000 cars after one a company supplying plastic parts and electronic component was hit by a suspected cyber attack.</p> <p>No information was immediately available about who was behind the attack or the motive. The attack comes just after Japan joined Western allies in clamping down on Russia due to its invasion of Ukraine, although it was not clear if the attack was at all related.</p> <p>A spokesperson at the supplier, Kojima Industries Corp, said it appeared to be some kind of cyber attack. A spokesperson from Toyota described it as a "supplier system failure."</p>

	<p>The production halt comes as the world's biggest automaker is tackling supply chain disruptions around the world caused by the COVID pandemic that has forced it and other carmakers to curb output.</p> <p>Toyota this month also saw some production stopped in North America due to parts shortages caused by the Canadian trucker protests.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Anonymous: 300 Russia cyber targets hit
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/anonymous-claims-hits-on-more-than-300-russian-cyber-targets-in-48-hours-including-gas-control-system/
GIST	<p>An Anonymous account reported earlier today that the hacking collective's #OpRussia campaign had taken down more than 300 Russian government, state media and bank websites over the past 48 hours, with the majority of those struggling to come back online.</p> <p>As members of the collective posted information about their operations on Twitter, one account said that hackers breached a Russian Linux terminal and gas control system in Nogir, North Ossetia. "We changed the dates and almost make its gas pressure become so high to turn into fireworks! Luckily we didn't because of a fast-acting human controller," the post said, adding screenshots of the breach.</p> <p>One Anonymous Twitter account claimed Saturday evening that it was responsible for knocking the Chechen government website offline, and it was still down this morning. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, a Putin ally who vowed to "carry out his orders under any circumstances" and has been accused of scores of human rights abuses, said Saturday that Chechen units had deployed to Ukraine.</p> <p>Another Anon account said Russian state TV channels had been hacked "to broadcast the truth about what happens in #Ukraine." One account posted video of Russian state TV being hacked to broadcast Ukraine's national anthem.</p> <p>Another posted audio of what it said were Russian military communications intercepted by the hackers; they broadcast the Ukrainian national anthem on that Russian channel as well.</p> <p>Members of the collective posted a video press release Saturday that vowed "these actions will continue," as "activists will not sit idle as Russian forces kill and murder innocent people trying to defend their homeland."</p> <p>"To all of the Russian soldiers who may read or hear of this message, and to any of their family and friends who may be able to pass this message along, we strongly encourage all of you in the Russian forces to lay down your weapons and just walk away. Putin's crimes do not have to be your crimes," the message continued. "As bombs fall on Ukraine together as a collective we will try our best to give valid information to the people of Russia about the crazy actions of Putin and also try our best to help the people of Ukraine by giving them care packages: Our care packages are meant to help keep data channels open and to also help obfuscate their communications from prying eyes."</p> <p>The hackers acknowledged that "some of our actions may be considered illegal in the eyes of various governments," but they saw "no reason any western laws should be used against our actions in trying to protect and defend the people of Ukraine, and also to help educate the people of Russia."</p> <p>"As soon as Vlad started his war on the people of Ukraine, he started to censor Twitter and Facebook in Russia," the video continued. "The solution to circumvent any intervention by Russian internet providers is to use the Tor network or a virtual private network. We do understand that using a VPN or Tor in Russia to access restricted content is against the law, so you must do so at your own risk."</p> <p>The video signs off: "Vlad should have expected us."</p>

A message released by Anonymous Liberland and the Pwn-Bär Hack Team announced the start of #OpCyberBullyPutin “to show you how prepared for cyberwar Russia and CIS countries really are.”

“Our Russian APT friends seem kinda out of shape, don’t they? Defacements? DDoS attacks? What year is this? 2012?” The group said it hacked Belarusian defense manufacturer Tetraedr and obtained more than 200 gigabytes of emails, and subsequently leaked the data.

Hackers have been generally using #OpRussia or #OpKremlin hashtags to announce actions against Russian sites, similar to the #OpISIS campaign that targeted the terror group’s wave of online propaganda and the #OpKKK campaign that targets white supremacists.

Hackers identifying with the Anonymous collective announced the launch of #OpRussia Thursday (Eastern time), saying that their cyber operations briefly took down some websites associated with the Russian government. An Anonymous account on Twitter claimed that the group took down “the website of the #Russian propaganda station RT News | <http://rt.com> | in response to Kremlin’s brutal invasion of #Ukraine.” The site was back up later.

Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov announced Saturday a Telegram channel for the IT Army of Ukraine: “We are creating an IT army. We need digital talents. All operational tasks will be given here: <https://t.me/itarmyofurraine>. There will be tasks for everyone. We continue to fight on the cyber front.”

“In 2022 modern technologies are one of the best response to tanks, rockets and missiles,” he tweeted. “I’ve addressed to the biggest tech giants to support the sanctions for Russian Federation. We asked them to help us stop this outrageous aggression on our people!”

Fedorov has been using social media to call on companies to digitally cut off Russia, including asking all major crypto exchanges to block addresses of Russian users. “Mark Zuckerberg, while you create Metaverse — Russia ruins real life in Ukraine! We ask you to ban access to @facebookapp and @instagram from Russia — as long as tanks and missiles attack our kindergartens and hospitals!” he tweeted this morning.

DHS’ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the FBI issued [a joint Cybersecurity Advisory](#) Saturday providing an overview of destructive malware that has been used to target organizations in Ukraine as well as guidance on how organizations can detect and protect their networks. On Wednesday, Russian cyber forces hit the websites of several Ukrainian banks and government departments with a wave of DDoS attacks.

An intelligence brief from the Department of Homeland Security in January [warned](#) stakeholders that Russia “would consider” launching a cyber attack against the United States if the U.S. or NATO respond to Russia’s potential invasion of Ukraine in a way that the Kremlin perceived as threatening to Russian security.

The memo also noted that Russia’s threshold for directly launching a destructive attack against U.S. critical infrastructure with its cyber arsenal “probably remains very high” though Moscow “continues to target and gain access to critical infrastructure in the United States.”

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HEADLINE	02/25 Most attackers lose interest in Log4Shell
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/most-attackers-lose-interest-in-log4shell/
GIST	<p>After all the hype in December last year, threat actors appear to have lost interest in exploiting the Log4Shell vulnerability, as both Sophos and the SANS Internet Storm Center are reporting dwindling numbers this year.</p> <p>Tracked as CVE-2021-44228, the vulnerability is more commonly known as Log4Shell. It is a security flaw in Apache Log4j, a small library that is used to add logging capabilities to Java-coded projects.</p>

Details about the Log4Shell vulnerability were disclosed last December and got almost everyone's attention because of the library's huge userbase and the simple one-line exploit.

"Our sensors detected exploit attempts almost immediately," Johannes Ullrich, ICS SANS fellow, said in a [report](#) this week.

Initially, Log4Shell scanning saw a huge spike in activity as threat actors began searching the internet for Java apps that might have used the Log4j library and were testing the exploit to see what was vulnerable. But these spikes in attacks only lasted around three weeks; until the end of 2021.

"Over time, attackers and researchers lost interest in Log4j," Ullrich said.

Log4Shell exploitation numbers published by UK security firm [Sophos](#) at the end of January also confirm the downward trend and eventual plateau.

At the time, Sophos said that one of the reasons for attackers losing interest in Log4Shell was the complex nature of the Java ecosystem, where the Log4j library was implemented in different ways across Java apps.

This meant that the dead-simple universal exploit that was disclosed last year was not that universal, after all.

Threat actors had to reverse-engineer Java apps, see how and where Log4j is used, and then try different exploit variations and see what worked best. This entire process was and still is complex and time-consuming, a job that threat actors rarely bother with, especially when new vulnerabilities are disclosed each week, some of which are easier to exploit.

Since then, coordinated mass-attacks using Log4Shell have taken place, but usually only after proof-of-concept code was published somewhere online, sparing some groups from doing any of the hard work themselves.

This is how we've seen attacks only against a handful of devices, such as [VMWare Horizon](#), [VMWare vCenter](#), [ZyXEL routers](#), [SolarWinds Serv-U server](#), and [Ubiquiti networking devices](#).

But despite the small number of Log4Shell scans and exploitation attempts today, Sophos warned defenders last month not to discount this threat.

"This doesn't mean the threat level declined too," Sophos' Chester Wisniewski said.

The researcher said that the initial spike in Log4Shell scanning in December might have been driven by security researchers monitoring the patch status of the Java ecosystem, and the current and lower number of scans may hide the real attacks.

And he was right. Four weeks later, SentinelOne put out a [report](#) about one of Iran's state-sponsored groups abusing Log4Shell to go after VMWare Horizon servers, confirming that not all attackers have lost interest in the vulnerability and the threat still remains for companies running unpatched Java systems.

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HEADLINE	02/26 Social media hijacking malware
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/social-media-hijacking-malware.html
GIST	A new malware capable of controlling social media accounts is being distributed through Microsoft's official app store in the form of trojanized gaming apps, infecting more than 5,000 Windows machines in Sweden, Bulgaria, Russia, Bermuda, and Spain.

Israeli cybersecurity company Check Point dubbed the malware "Electron Bot," in reference to a command-and-control (C2) domain used in recent campaigns. The identity of the attackers is not known, but evidence suggests that they could be based out of Bulgaria.

"Electron Bot is a modular SEO poisoning malware, which is used for social media promotion and click fraud," Check Point's Moshe Marelus [said](#) in a report published this week. "It is mainly distributed via the Microsoft store platform and dropped from dozens of infected applications, mostly games, which are constantly uploaded by the attackers."

The first sign of malicious activity commenced as an ad clicker campaign that was discovered in October 2018, with the malware hiding in plain sight in the form of a Google Photos app, as disclosed by [Bleeping Computer](#).

In the years since, the malware is said to have undergone numerous iterations that equip the malware with new features and evasive capabilities. In addition to using the cross-platform Electron framework, the bot is designed to load payloads fetched from the C2 server at run time, making it difficult to detect.

"This enables the attackers to modify the malware's payload and change the bots' behavior at any given time," Marelus explained.

Electron Bot's core functionality is to open a hidden browser window in order to carry out SEO poisoning, generate clicks for ads, direct traffic to content hosted on YouTube and SoundCloud, and promote specific products to generate profits with ad clicking or increase store rating for higher sales.

On top of that, it also comes with functions that can control social media accounts on Facebook, Google and Sound Cloud, including registering new accounts, signing in, as well as commenting and liking other posts to increase views.

The attack sequence gets triggered when users download one of the infected applications (e.g., Temple Endless Runner 2) from the Microsoft store that, when launched, loads the game but also stealthily drops and installs the next stage dropper via JavaScript.

Along the way, there are steps to identify potential threat detection software from companies such as Kaspersky Lab, ESET, Norton Security, Webroot, Sophos, and F-Secure before the dropper proceeds to fetch the actual bot malware.

The list of game publishers that pushed the malware-laced apps is as follows –

- Lupy games
- Crazy 4 games
- Jeuxjeuxkeux games
- Akshi games
- Goo Games
- Bizzon Case

"As the bot's payload is loaded dynamically at every run time, the attackers can modify the code and change the bot's behavior to high risk," Marelus noted. "For example, they can initialize another second stage and drop a new malware such as ransomware or a RAT. All of this can happen without the victim's knowledge."

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HEADLINE	02/27 Iranian hackers new spying malware
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/iranian-hackers-using-new-spying.html
GIST	An Iranian geopolitical nexus threat actor has been uncovered deploying two new targeted malware that come with "simple" backdoor functionalities as part of an intrusion against an unnamed Middle East government entity in November 2021.

Cybersecurity company Mandiant attributed the attack to an uncategorized cluster it's tracking under the moniker UNC3313, which it assesses with "moderate confidence" as associated with the MuddyWater state-sponsored group.

"UNC3313 conducts surveillance and collects strategic information to support Iranian interests and decision-making," researchers Ryan Tomcik, Emiel Haeghebaert, and Tufail Ahmed [said](#). "Targeting patterns and related lures demonstrate a strong focus on targets with a geopolitical nexus."

In mid-January 2022, U.S. intelligence agencies [characterized](#) MuddyWater (aka Static Kitten, Seedworm, TEMP.Zagros, or Mercury) as a subordinate element of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) that has been active since at least 2018 and is known to use a wide range of tools and techniques in its operations.

The attacks are said to have been orchestrated via spear-phishing messages to gain initial access, followed by taking advantage of publicly available offensive security tools and remote access software for lateral movement and maintaining access to the environment.

The phishing emails were crafted with a job promotion lure and deceived multiple victims to click a URL to download a RAR archive file hosted on OneHub, which paved the way for the installation of ScreenConnect, a legitimate remote access software, for gaining a foothold.

"UNC3313 moved rapidly to establish remote access by using ScreenConnect to infiltrate systems within an hour of initial compromise," the researchers noted, adding the security incident was quickly contained and remediated.

Subsequent phases of the attack involved escalating privileges, carrying out internal reconnaissance on the targeted network, and running obfuscated PowerShell commands to download additional tools and payloads on remote systems.

Also observed was a previously undocumented backdoor called STARWHALE, a Windows Script File (.WSF) that executes commands received from a hardcoded command-and-control (C2) server via HTTP.

Another implant delivered during the course of the attack is GRAMDOOR, so named owing to its use of the Telegram API for its network communications with the attacker-controlled server in a bid to evade detection, once again highlighting the use of [communication tools](#) for facilitating exfiltration of data.

The findings also coincide with a [new joint advisory](#) from cybersecurity agencies from the U.K. and the U.S., accusing the MuddyWater group of espionage attacks targeting the defense, local government, oil and natural gas and telecommunications sectors across the globe.

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HEADLINE	02/26 CISA, FBI alert: prepare for Ukraine wipers
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cyberespionage/cisa-fbi-to-us-firms-prepare-for-ukraine-wipers
GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the FBI issued a joint alert Saturday warning that the two wiper strains that attacked Ukrainian enterprises in the run-up to Russia's invasion of the country could affect United States businesses. The agencies urged preparedness.</p> <p>"Further disruptive cyberattacks against organizations in Ukraine are likely to occur and may unintentionally spill over to organizations in other countries. Organizations should increase vigilance and evaluate their capabilities encompassing planning, preparation, detection, and response for such an event," the alert writes.</p> <p>Ukraine has been hit by two strains of wiper malware in distinct attacks since the beginning of the year. In January, Microsoft reported WhisperGate. On Wednesday, in the hours before the invasion, ESET</p>

reported [HermeticWiper](#). The wipers were not the only form of cyberattacks seen in Ukraine since the beginning of the year; attackers launched two rounds of coordinated DDoS and SMS spam against the country as well.

The United States has not formally attributed the wiper attacks to Russia, though the CISA and FBI alert connects the attacks to the "unprovoked [kinetic] attack against Ukraine." That is not an attribution, as actors inspired but not directed by Russia could hypothetically be behind the attacks.

According to reports from Broadcom's Symantec division, the CISA and FBI fears wiper attacks might reach beyond Ukraine — either intentionally or accidentally — are founded. Though [ESET's telemetry](#) found "hundreds" of victims in Ukraine, [Symantec](#) found limited instances in enterprises hit in Latvia and Lithuania.

The CISA and FBI report contains hashes for both strains of wiper, links to the reports from ESET, Symantec and SentinelLabs detailing the malware, including its internals, and advice about how to prepare for potential wiper attacks.

The alert warns that, given the wiper's ability to spread, "it is important for organizations to assess their environment for atypical channels for malware delivery and/or propagation throughout their systems," namely third-party risk — including the risk from antivirus software itself.

It advises that wipers may disable critical components of a network intended to mitigate their wiping, including network storage devices. The alert further urges "targeted assessment and enforcement of best practices," including a secure network topology, identity management, staggering antivirus update times across the network to limit the risk of a malicious update, as well as general hardening of networks and disaster preparation.

"Organizations are encouraged to report incidents to the FBI and CISA...and to preserve forensic data for use in internal investigation of the incident or for possible law enforcement purposes," writes the alert, which includes a contact form to submit information.

In a statement to the press about the alert FBI Cyber Division Assistant Director Bryan Vorndran said the FBI needed the cooperation of enterprises to maximize security.

"We are striving to disrupt and diminish these threats, however we cannot do this alone, we continue to share information with our public and private sector partners and encourage them to report any suspicious activity. We ask that organizations continue to shore up their systems to prevent any increased impediment in the event of an incident," he said.

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HEADLINE	02/25 CISA issues MuddyWater warning
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cisa-issues-muddywater-warning/
GIST	<p>Authorities in the UK and United States have issued an alert regarding a group of Iranian government-sponsored advanced persistent threat (APT) actors known as MuddyWater.</p> <p>The actors, who are also known as Earth Vetala, MERCURY, Static Kitten, Seedworm, and TEMP.Zagros, have been observed conducting cyber espionage and other malicious cyber operations in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America.</p> <p>A joint alert issued on Thursday by CISA, the FBI, NSA, US Cyber Command Cyber National Mission Force and the UK's National Cyber Security Centre, warned that MuddyWater has been targeting a range of government and private sector organizations across multiple industries including telecommunications, defense, local government and oil and natural gas.</p>

Since approximately 2018, MuddyWater has conducted broad cyber campaigns under the auspices of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), providing stolen data and accesses both to the Iranian government and other malicious cyber actors.

"MuddyWater actors are known to exploit publicly reported vulnerabilities and use open-source tools and strategies to gain access to sensitive data on victims' systems and deploy ransomware," states the alert.

"These actors also maintain persistence on victim networks via tactics such as side-loading dynamic link libraries (DLLs) – to trick legitimate programs into running malware – and obfuscating PowerShell scripts to hide command and control (C2) functions."

Recently, MuddyWater actors have been spotted using multiple malware sets including PowGoop, Small Sieve, Canopy/Starwhale, Mori and POWERSTATS for loading malware, backdoor access, persistence and exfiltration.

The APT actors have also attempted to gain access to sensitive government and commercial networks through a spearphishing campaign that coaxes victims into downloading ZIP files. Victim unwittingly download either an Excel file with a malicious macro that communicates with the actor's C2 server or a PDF file that drops a malicious file onto the victim's network.

James McQuiggan, security awareness advocate at [KnowBe4](#), advised email users to "conduct a quick checklist of 'Do I know this person,' 'Am I expecting this email,' 'Is the request unusual and unlike the sender' and 'Is there a sense of urgency' to the request?"

He added: "Answering these questions unfavorably should trigger the user to examine the email a little closer and report to their IT or InfoSec teams."

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HEADLINE	02/27 Malware families pay-per-install service
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/malware-families-pay-per-install-service-expand-targets/
GIST	<p>The PrivateLoader is a Pay-Per-Install malware (PPI) that delivers a wide variety of malware. Including Vidar, Raccoon, Redline, Smokeloader, Danabot, GCleaner, Discoloader, and others, according to Intel 471.</p> <p>The dangerous PPI malware service isn't new. Yet authorities haven't managed to pinpoint who exactly is behind its development. Malicious hackers/threat actors use loaders to send extra payloads to targeted machines.</p> <p>Cybercriminals use PrivateLoader on an installation basis. The payment for the payload is based on the number of victims that were infected with malware.</p> <p>The Malware is Shared Through Cracked Software Updates</p> <p>The PrivateLoader uses C2 (a set of command-and-control servers). And an administrator panel that carries AdminLTE3. It is among the most trendy malware loaders on the web. And the loader is installed and deployed by hackers more than ever.</p> <p>Cracked software websites distribute malware. These illegal forms of updates are tampered with to avoid licensing or payment. Though the thought of getting software or licensing for free is appealing to many, they should abstain from it.</p> <p>The cybersecurity firm Intel 471 discovered various malicious executable exe. files. Once installed on a users' PC, various malware such as PrivateLoader, GCleaner, or Redline load reseller.</p>

The most popular distributed malware appears to be Smokeloader, as of May 2021. This malware can perform various surveillance and data theft actions. The Vidar malware can steal digital wallet information, passwords, and documents. The Redline malware steals credentials.

PPI Services Are Useful to Hackers

Threat actors love software that gives them the ability to launch attacks with greater versatility. PPI services, as observed, are widely used by hackers due to their usefulness. Researchers state that cybercriminals will explore all the attacking options available to them.

The versatility of each malware must be carefully analyzed and countered. Malware defenders work on various strategies to stop malware attacks employed by PrivateLoader. To learn more about the service, researchers started tracking and automating malware coverage actions in September 2021.

The data already gathered is used to come up with better cybersecurity. Researchers have already discovered another malware delivered by the PrivateLoader, the Qbot banking Trojan.

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HEADLINE	02/27 SockDetour targets US defense contractors
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/sockdetour-fileless-backdoor-us-defense-contractors/
GIST	<p>Palo Alto Network's Unit 42 researchers discovered a tool that could be used as a backup backdoor if the primary backdoor gets deleted by defenders. Its principal function is to maintain access to infected networks. This custom malware, dubbed SockDetour, launched targeted attacks on US defense contractors.</p> <p>SockDetour in Use Since 2019</p> <p>According to Unit 42's research team, SockDetour payload's operators kept it under the radar for over three years as it was used for the first time in the wild in 2019. The malware's stealthiness is lethal and can operate socketlessly and filelessly on compromised Windows servers after hijacking network connections, making it difficult to detect it at the network and host levels. It is compiled in 64-bit PE file format.</p> <p>SockDetour Capabilities</p> <p>The malware lets attackers stay on compromised Windows servers stealthily. This is achieved by loading in legit service processes filelessly and utilizing authentic network sockets of the processes to establish its encrypted C2 channel.</p> <p>At Least 4 US Defense Contractors Targeted</p> <p>Researchers initially observed that the malware was deployed onto the Windows servers of at least one defense contractor in the US. The attack was detected on 27 July 2021. This incident led to the identification of three more defense contractors targeted by the same entity and the same backdoor.</p> <p>Based on Unit 42's telemetry data and the analysis of the collected samples, we believe the threat actor behind SockDetour has been focused on targeting U.S.-based defense contractors using the tools. Unit 42 has evidence of at least four defense contractors being targeted by this campaign, with a compromise of at least one contractor.</p> <p>How are Windows Servers Hijacked?</p> <p>According to Unit 42's blog post, the connection hijacking is performed through using authentic Microsoft Detours library package. This package is used for Windows API call instrumentation and monitoring.</p> <p>In one of the attacks, researchers noted that attackers also used a specific delivery server identified as a QNAP network-attached storage device or NAS device. Typically, small businesses use this device or those infected with QLocker ransomware previously. Researchers believe threat actors exploited a remote code execution bug tracked as CVE-2021-28799 to access the server.</p> <p>Possible Perpetrator</p>

	<p>Researchers at Unit 42 suspect that the SockDetour backdoor is used in attacks carried out by an APT (advanced persistent threat) group called TiltedTemple. The group made headlines when it exploited vulnerabilities in Zoho products such as ServiceDesk Plus (CVE-2021-44077) and ManageEngine ADSelfService Plus (CVE-2021-40539).</p> <p>This suspicion is based on the tools and tactics that match APT27's previous malicious activities where the group primarily targeted defense, aerospace, technology, manufacturing, government, and energy sectors in espionage campaigns.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Nvidia investigates potential cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/gpu-giant-nvidia-is-investigating-a-potential-cyberattack/
GIST	<p>US chipmaker giant Nvidia confirmed today it's currently investigating an "incident" that reportedly took down some of its systems for two days.</p> <p>Systems impacted in what looks like a cyberattack include the company's developer tools and email systems, as first reported by The Telegraph.</p> <p>The reported outage is the result of a network intrusion, and it is still not known if any business or customer data was stolen during the incident.</p> <p>Nvidia told BleepingComputer that the nature of the incident is still being evaluated and that the company's commercial activities were not affected.</p> <p>"We are investigating an incident. Our business and commercial activities continue uninterrupted," an Nvidia spokesperson told BleepingComputer.</p> <p>"We are still working to evaluate the nature and scope of the event and don't have any additional information to share at this time."</p> <p>An insider has described this incident as having "completely compromised" Nvidia's internal systems. While some reports are speculating that Russia is behind this incident, there is nothing indicating this is true at the time.</p> <p>On February 8, the American chipmaker terminated previously announced efforts to acquire British semiconductor giant Arm for \$80 billion.</p> <p><i>Update February 26, 07:55 EST:</i> The Lapsus\$ data extortion group claims they breached and stole 1 TB of data from Nvidia's network.</p> <p>They also leaked online what they claim to be password hashes for all Nvidia employees.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has not been able to independently verify the gang's claims yet.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 TrickBot malware operation shuts down
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/trickbot-malware-operation-shuts-down-devs-move-to-stealthier-malware/
GIST	<p>The TrickBot malware operation has shut down after its core developers move to the Conti ransomware gang to focus development on the stealthy BazarBackdoor and Anchor malware families.</p> <p>TrickBot is a notorious Windows malware infection that has dominated the threat landscape since 2016.</p> <p>The malware is commonly installed via malicious phishing emails or other malware, and will quietly run on a victim's computer while it downloads modules to perform different tasks.</p>

These modules perform a wide range of malicious activities, including [stealing a domain's Active Directory Services database](#), [spreading laterally on a network](#), [screen locking](#), [stealing cookies and browser passwords](#), and [stealing OpenSSH keys](#).

TrickBot also has a long relationship with ransomware operations who partnered with the TrickBot group to receive initial access to networks infected by the malware.

In 2019, the TrickBot Group [partnered with the Ryuk ransomware operation](#) to provide the ransomware gang initial access to networks. In 2020, the Conti ransomware group, believed to be a rebrand of Ryuk, also [partnered with TrickBot for initial access](#).

In 2021, TrickBot attempted to launch their own [ransomware operation called Diavol](#), which has never really picked up steam, possibly because [one of its developers was arrested](#).

Despite numerous [takedown attempts by law enforcement](#), TrickBot had successfully rebuilt its botnet and continued to terrorize Windows networks.

That is until December 2021, when TrickBot distribution campaigns suddenly ceased.

TrickBot operation shuts down

Over the last year, Conti has become one of the most resilient and lucrative ransomware operations, responsible for numerous attacks on high-profile victims and amassing hundreds of millions of dollars in ransom payments.

As [reported by BleepingComputer last week](#), due to the enormous wealth and capital at their disposal and TrickBot primarily being used by Conti, the ransomware gang slowly took control of the operation.

However, Conti did not recruit these "elite developers and managers" to work on the TrickBot malware, but rather to work on the more stealthy [BazarBackdoor](#) and [Anchor](#) malware families as seen by internal conversations shared with BleepingComputer by cybersecurity firm AdvIntel.

AdvIntel [explained last week](#) that the shift in development is because the TrickBot malware is too easily detected by security software and that the operation would be shut down shortly.

Yesterday, AdvIntel CEO Vitali Kremez told BleepingComputer that the TrickBot Group shut down all of the infrastructure for the TrickBot malware operation.

In a conversation with Kremez, BleepingComputer was told that the Conti ransomware now controls the TrickBot Group's malware development for their own needs.

With this shutdown, Kremez explained that TrickBot crime ring, who initially launched to pursue fraud, now focuses almost entirely on ransomware and breaching networks.

A [report released yesterday](#) by cyber intelligence firm Intel471 also confirmed that the operation was shutting down in favor of more profitable platforms.

While it is always good to see a malware operation shut down, the reality is that the ransomware gangs have already transitioned over to the more stealthy BazarBackdoor family.

BazarBackdoor has already seen increased distribution via email over the past six months, but with TrickBot's shutdown, we will likely see it become more prevalent in network breaches of corporate entities.

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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/conti-ransomwares-internal-chats-leaked-after-siding-with-russia/
GIST	<p>A Ukrainian security researcher has leaked over 60,000 internal messages belonging to the Conti ransomware operation after the gang sided with Russia over the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has independently confirmed the validity of these messages from internal conversations previously shared with BleepingComputer regarding Conti's attack on Shutterfly.</p> <p>AdvIntel CEO Vitali Kremez, who has been tracking the Conti/TrickBot operation over the last couple of years, also confirmed to BleepingComputer that the leaked messages are valid and were taken from a log server for the Jabber communication system used by the ransomware gang.</p> <p>Kremez told BleepingComputer that the data was leaked by a researcher who had access to the "ejabberd database" backend for Conti's XMPP chat server. This was also confirmed by cybersecurity firm Hold Security.</p> <p>In total, there are 393 leaked JSON files containing a total of 60,694 messages since January 21, 2021, through today. Conti launched their operation in July 2020, so while it contains a big chunk of their internal conversations, it is not all of them.</p> <p>These conversations contain various information about the gang's activities, including previously unreported victims, private data leak URLs, bitcoin addresses, and discussions about their operations.</p> <p>The leak of these messages is a severe blow to the ransomware operation, providing sensitive intelligence to researchers and law enforcement about their internal processes.</p> <p>While the above snippets are only a tiny piece of the leaked conversations, we can expect to see far more information learned from the data in the coming weeks.</p> <p>Messages leaked over Conti's siding with Russia</p> <p>Earlier this week, the Conti ransomware operation published a blog post announcing their full support for the Russian government's attack on Ukraine. They also warned that if anyone organized a cyberattack against Russia, the Conti gang would strike back at critical infrastructure.</p> <p>After Ukrainian Conti affiliates grew upset over the siding with Russia, the Conti gang replaced their message with another one, stating that they "do not ally with any government" and that they "condemn the ongoing war."</p> <p>However, their change of heart came too late, and a Ukrainian security researcher who reportedly had access to Conti's backend XMPP server emailed BleepingComputer and other journalists tonight with a link to the leaked data.</p> <p>The reason shared as to why they leaked the private conversations can be read below: <i>Here is a friendly heads-up that the Conti gang has just lost all their sh*t. Please know this is true. The link will take you to download an 1.tgz file that can be unpacked running tar -xzf 1.tgz command in your terminal .</i> <i>The contents of the first dump contain the chat communications (current, as of today and going to the past) of the Conti Ransomware gang. We promise it is very interesting.</i> <i>There are more dumps coming , stay tuned.</i> <i>You can help the world by writing this as your top story.</i> <i>It is not malware or a joke.</i> <i>This is being sent to many journalists and researchers.</i> <i>Thank you for your support</i> <i>Glory to Ukraine!</i></p>

	<p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to hackers, ransomware gangs, and security researchers picking sides in the conflict.</p> <p>While some ransomware gangs have sided with Russia, others, like LockBit, are staying neutral.</p> <p>On the other hand, Ukraine has asked volunteer researchers and hackers to join their "IT Army" to conduct cyberattacks on Russian targets, with many rallying to the call.</p> <p>As for Conti, while this leak is embarrassing and provides immense insight into their operation, we are not likely to see them going away any time soon. With their recent take over of the stealthy BazarBackdoor malware and becoming an actual crime syndicate, they will, unfortunately, continue to be a threat.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Ransomware gangs, hackers pick sides
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ransomware-gangs-hackers-pick-sides-over-russia-invading-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Hacker crews are picking sides as the Russian invasion into Ukraine continues, issuing bans and threats for supporters of the opposite side.</p> <p>This week, an administrator of the database sharing and marketplace Raidforums announced that it would close its door on users connecting from Russia, clearly expressing their position against Kremlin's actions.</p> <p>Earlier today, the Conti ransomware group stated their "full support of Russian government" and threatened with cyberattacks against anyone launching attacks against Russia.</p> <p>Hackers react</p> <p>Hackers, state-backed or not, have already launched cyberattacks, most of them against Ukrainian targets [1, 2, 3], with some targets in Russia also being hit [1].</p> <p>With the Russian aggression continuing, the hacker community started to get more involved and express their stance in the conflict.</p> <p>Following the political model of the U.S. and the EU, Raidforums published a notification yesterday saying that it would impose its own sanctions by banning any user connecting from Russia.</p> <p>One member of the Raidforums community published a more abrasive message as a warning to "Russians." The user posted a database with emails and hashed passwords for the FSB.ru domain of Russia's main security agency, the Federal Security Service (FSB).</p> <p>In the sample data shared on the forum as proof of provenance there are email addresses for FSB offices (directorates) in various regions.</p> <p>The same user has previously posted similar databases for .mil domains in the United States.</p> <p>Ransomware gangs get involved</p> <p>Today, the Conti ransomware gang issued a warning that they would respond to cyber activity against Russia using all their resources "to strike back at the critical infrastructures of an enemy."</p> <p>The gang changed their message about an hour later, saying that they "do not ally with any government and we condemn the ongoing war" but will respond to Western cyber aggression on Russian critical infrastructure.</p> <p>Conti is one of the most active ransomware actors in the industrial sector, being responsible last year for breaching 63 companies operating industrial control systems (ICS), most of the in the manufacturing sector.</p>

	<p>Conti also took control of BazarBackdoor, the stealthy malware developed by the TrickBot gang for compromising high-value targets.</p> <p>CoomingProject, another, less known, ransomware group also announced their support for the Russian government if cyberattacks are aimed at the country.</p> <p>Ukraine asks hacker community for help</p> <p>It appears that the Ukrainian side is also trying to engage its hacker force to defend critical infrastructure from coordinated cyberattacks and to carry out cyberespionage operations on Russian activity.</p> <p>Reuters details that a message for the Ukrainian underground hacker community posted at the request of the Defense Ministry called the cybercommunity to enroll in a mission to defend the country.</p> <p>The call to action was published through Yegor Aushev, the founder of Cyber Unit Technologies, who yesterday shared an application form for volunteer hackers to sign up declaring their skills for a better organization of tasks.</p> <p>In one post, Aushev claims that even hackers around the world, including from Russia, have responded to his call, who will be grouped into teams for offensive and defensive action.</p> <p>It is clear that modern warfare has entered a new age as physical armed forces are now openly supported by cyber activity carried not just by individuals with formal training but also self-taught hackers on both sides of the law.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Ukraine troops targeted in phishing attacks
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/endpoint/ukrainian-troops-targeted-in-phishing-attacks-by-suspected-belarusian-apt
GIST	<p>A fresh wave of phishing attacks targeting the Ukrainian military appears to be the handiwork of the UNC1151 military hacking team out of neighboring nation Belarus, according to the Ukraine Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT).</p> <p>The email — sent to victims' personal email accounts — attempts to lure the recipient to click on a malicious link that then siphons their email messages and address books to further spread the phishing campaign. UNC1151 traditionally has waged attacks for cyber-espionage purposes, according to Mandiant, and comes at a time of high cyber alert in Ukraine and elsewhere.</p> <p>"Mass phishing emails have recently been observed targeting private 'i.ua' and 'meta.ua' accounts of Ukrainian military personnel and related individuals. After the account is compromised, the attackers, by the IMAP protocol, get access to all the messages. Later, the attackers use contact details from the victim's address book to send the phishing emails," the CERT posted on its social media account, according to a report from Reuters.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Exposure: data leaks, shadow assets
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/02/25/cloud-storage-leaks-increasing/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>CybelAngel published a research revealing that data leaks and shadow assets are the greatest source of exposure to cyberattacks faced by large organizations across the globe. The report also highlights how the market pressures of 2021 led to an increase of such risks, with cloud storage leaks increasing by 150% compared to 2020.</p> <p>Based on data from a sample group of customers, the research report reveals that data leak incidents increased, overall, by 63% and vulnerable shadow assets exposure grew by 40% in 2021. This is evidence</p>

of organizations' ever-increasing digital footprint and the expanding attack surface of today's connected enterprises.

Source code data leaks rise by two-thirds between 2020 and 2021

Labour shortages among developers led to greater outsourcing of development projects, with 86%² of hiring managers and technical recruiters now finding it a challenge to hire developers. At the same time, the acceleration of digital transformation meant that more development projects were needed, with a 47%³ increase in new public repositories created on GitHub between 2020 and 2021.

The increase in outsourced development projects led to a 66% increase in source [code](#) leaks. The final quarter of 2021 saw a massive 117% jump in the number of GitHub incident reports sent to CybelAngel's sample group of customers, compared to the previous quarter.

Increase in 'major risks' from credentials leaks

The digital risks caused by exposed [credentials](#) continued to plague cybersecurity, including account takeover, credential stuffing, network infiltration, and ransomware attacks. In the sample group of companies, exposed credentials accounted for 25% of all incident reports sent.

One of the most significant findings was that the severity of exposed credential incidents has changed dramatically with a 50% increase in the number of 'major' incidents, defined as those having the potential to interrupt business operations as a result of account takeover.

Cloud storage leaks increasing 150% year-on-year

As digital transformation continued following the work-at-home revolution, incidents of [cloud](#) storage leaking proprietary data, or confidential information, grew by 150% year-over-year.

40% growth in shadow IT incidents in H2 2021

With the increasing prevalence in cloud adoption, and the ease with which applications and services can be used without the sanction of IT departments, the number of vulnerable [shadow assets](#) grew by 40% over H2 2021. 17% of shadow asset incidents sent to CybelAngel customers across 2021 were rated 'major' or 'critical'.

Commenting on the findings, [Pauline Losson](#), Cyber Operations Director at [CybelAngel](#) and Head Researcher on the report said: "The report pulls into sharp focus the security impact of digital risks that have occurred following the seismic changes in the world of work.

"The huge growth in cloud adoption and organizations' increasing reliance on outsourcing development work means that all risks are, in effect, moving to the cloud. The idea of securing the perimeter is no longer tenable. Organizations are facing systemic cyber risks, driven by sophisticated criminal groups exploiting the fact that external threats are reaching a level of unavoidable risk.

"The good news for organizations is that, if dealt with early, each of the threats identified in the report can be remediated relatively quickly and at low cost. The key is visibility and speed in order to locate all exposed assets pertaining to an organization's attack surface before they are breached by malicious actors. As risks change each day, organizations need to be ready to respond through continuous monitoring."

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HEADLINE	02/25 Jester Stealer malware adds capabilities
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/jester-stealer-malware-adds-more-capabilities-to-entice-hackers/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>An infostealing piece of malware called Jester Stealer has been gaining popularity in the underground cybercrime community for its functionality and affordable prices.</p> <p>The infostealer malware category has been on the rise for the past years as they provide a wide array of sensitive data collection and are easy to deploy.</p>

According to an analysis from [Cyble Research](#), Jester Stealer is an emerging threat that first appeared on cybercrime forums in July 2021. Since then, it has been updated seven times, with each version bringing new capabilities.

The latest version appears to be 1.7.1.0, announced in January 2022 with improvements such as better file transfer speeds and reduced runtime detections.

Currently, Jester Stealer is licensed to users for \$99 per month, or \$249 for lifetime access, while there's also a builder pack that costs \$999 for three months, the researchers say.

Jester's features

Jester Stealer is a multifunctional malware that combines the functions of a stealer, clipper, crypto-miner, and botnet.

It uses AES-CBC-256-encrypted communications, supports Tor network servers, redirects logs to telegram bots, and bundles stolen data in memory before exfiltration.

The data targeted by Jester includes the following:

- **Browsers:** Passwords, credit cards, cookies, autofill data, browsing history, and bookmarks of 20+ web browsers
- **Email clients:** Thunderbird, Outlook, and FoxMail
- **IM apps:** Telegram, Discord, WhatsApp, Signal, and Pidgin
- **Crypto wallets:** Atomic, Coinomi, Electrum, Exodus, Guarda, Jaxx, Wasabi, Zcash, BitcoinCore, DashCore, LiteCore, MoneroCore
- **Password managers:** KeePass, NordPass, LastPass, BitWarden, 1Password, RoboForm, and ten more password managers.
- **Gaming software:** Steam sessions, Twitch, and OBS profiles with broadcasting keys
- **VPN clients:** Windscribe VPN, NordVPN, EarthVPN, ProtonVPN, and OpenVPN
- **FTP clients:** FileZilla, CoreFTP, WinSCP, and Snowflake

In addition to the above, Jester Stealer can also grab screenshots, profile the host system to gather basic information, and also steals network passwords.

Sneaking into systems

The Jester Stealer is a .Net-based malware that typically gets to the target systems via phishing emails, disguised as a txt, jar, ps1, bat, png, doc, xls, pdf, mp3, mp4, or a ppt file attachment.

Alternatively, the threat actors employ random distribution channels such as pirated content and hack tools promoted via YouTube.

It features several built-in checks to prevent analysis by checking if it is executed in a virtualized environment.

If the malware detects the presence of VirtualBox, VMBox, or VMWare on the host system, it terminates its execution.

All stolen data is copied into the system memory, so nothing is written on the disk. The data is archived in a ZIP file before exfiltration over port 9050, passed through a TOR proxy.

Once the exfiltration is done, Jester Stealer deletes itself from the infected machine to minimize the chances of the victim ever realizing the data breach.

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HEADLINE	02/27 Google turns off Maps feature in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dgjka/google-maps-ukraine-live-traffic-russia-invasion

GIST	<p>Google has temporarily disabled tools that provide live information about traffic conditions in Ukraine, the company confirmed to VICE World News, following reports that people around the world were using the service to track the movements of troops and civilians during the Russian invasion.</p> <p>Google Maps' live traffic data works by incorporating location and speed information from smartphones with the app, then using it to show in real-time how dense traffic conditions are in certain places, or how busy those areas are overall. When Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an attack on Ukraine last week, however, some spectators realised the feature could also be used to provide open-source insights regarding the whereabouts of military operations.</p> <p>"I think we were the first people to see the invasion. And we saw it in a traffic app," Jeffrey Lewis, an open-source intelligence expert and professor at Middlebury Institute, told Motherboard, after he noticed an unusual traffic jam developing around the Russian border town of Belgorod on Thursday morning.</p> <p>This was just hours after Putin declared a "special military operation" in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas, foreshadowing a potential invasion. But the traffic buildup Lewis was seeing on Google Maps was across the border from a different region of Ukraine, north of Kharkiv, and slowly extended to the border before it disappeared.</p> <p>"We have developed incredibly data rich definitions of what normal patterns of life look like," Lewis explained. "And any deviation is immediately caught."</p> <p>It is unclear when exactly Google disabled the Maps live traffic data. The company declined to comment on what it was specifically that prompted the move, or whether it had ever done something similar for conflicts in the past. Google said only that it had taken the action for the safety of local Ukrainian communities following consultations with sources including regional authorities.</p> <p>Experts had previously flagged the potential for Google's data to be exploited by invading Russian forces, who could theoretically use the Maps traffic function to monitor Ukrainian troops and notice when they're on the move.</p> <p>"I think big data companies often don't want to face squarely how useful their data can be," Lewis said. "I mean, it's cool when we do it, right? It's maybe less cool if the Russians were able to do something similar to, you know, spotting an offensive from Ukrainians."</p> <p>Google's announcement came just a day after the Ukrainian government called on "all road organisations, territorial communities, [and] local authorities to immediately start dismantling road signs nearby."</p> <p>"Dismantling road signs on all roads of the country. Priority #1 - indicators, names of settlements. Collected signs are handed over to local authorities and roadmen," Ukravtodor, the government agency responsible for Ukraine's national road system, wrote in a Facebook post.</p> <p>"The enemy has a pathetic connection, they don't orientate the area. Let's help them go straight to hell."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Shock: videos captured Russia soldiers
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/27/ukrainian-officials-upload-videos-of-captured-russian-soldiers-on-telegram
GIST	<p>Ukrainian officials have published dozens of videos of what they say are captured Russian soldiers, as the brutal fighting in Ukraine enters its fourth day.</p> <p>In one of the videos, published early on Sunday morning on the Telegram channel Find Your Own, set up by Ukraine's interior ministry, a visibly injured soldier identifies himself as Leonid Paktishev, the commander of a sniper unit based in the Rostov region.</p>

The Telegram channel, which first went live on Saturday, has posted numerous videos and photos showing captured Russian troops, which have led to an outcry from their families who say they were shocked to find out about the involvement of their loved ones in the invasion of Ukraine.

The Guardian spoke to three family members who confirmed the identity of Paktishev and said they were shocked and angry when they found out after seeing the video that their loved one had been captured.

“I was sent the video of my brother captured at 2am last night. I was completely shocked. I had no idea that he was fighting in there,” said Yelena Polivtseva, the sister of Paktishev.

In the video, Paktishev, from the small town of Mezhdurechenskiy in western Siberia, said he led a team of three other snipers.

“I knew Leonid was in the military, but I had no idea that he was sent to Ukraine. I don’t think he would have been aware of it either,” said Polivtseva, who went by her maiden name.

Russia has so far not commented on the videos released and has revealed very little information about the state of its soldiers fighting in Ukraine. The Russian ministry of defence on Sunday evening for the first time admitted that there were “dead and wounded soldiers amongst our comrade[s]”, but added that “the number of destroyed [Ukrainian] nationalists by far outweigh” the number of Russian casualties.

Asked about her brother’s involvement in Russia’s unprovoked invasion into Ukraine, Polivtseva said she was not “competent” to judge the decision of our “commander-in-chief”. But she said she hoped the fighting would end. “No one needs this, not Ukraine and not Russia. I believe we can come to an agreement through peaceful means so that our sons, brothers and husbands don’t die.”

Polivtseva said she last talked to her brother over the new year holiday. She had also sent him a birthday message on social media on Thursday, the day the invasion started and he turned 28.

“I saw he was not online and got a bit worried then. Now am so so worried, I haven’t slept all night, my children are crying, our mother is in a critical state.”

Ukraine has been urging family members of captured Russian troops to contact them and to voice their opposition to the country’s involvement in the war.

The Ukrainian ministry of defence set up a hotline for the family members of Russian soldiers called “Come Back Alive from Ukraine”. According to the Kyiv Independent, the hotline had received “hundreds of calls” since the start of the invasion.

Another close family member of Paktishev, who asked for his name not to be used, expressed anger over the relative’s involvement in the war in Ukraine.

“How else can you feel?! Young boys are thrown like cannon fodder, and most importantly for what?! For palaces in Gelendzhik?” the family member said, referring to the palatial mansion on the Black Sea that Russian independent journalists have said is linked to Vladimir Putin.

The family member said he received an overnight message on their V Kontakte social media page informing them about the capture, with the video that was circulating online attached.

The message, seen by the Guardian said: “Good evening, I would like to say hi from the Ukrainian people. I would like to make you happy that a close person to you is still alive. Go out and protest, overthrow your government before we bury all in Ukrainian soil. Be damned and burn in hell. Glory to Ukraine.”

Dmitry Selyanin, a third relative of Paktishev the Guardian spoke to, said he had been in a state of disbelief ever since he found out about his cousin’s capture. “He is a sniper and snipers aren’t loved by the

enemy. In the video we don't get to see the other snipers in his group, we don't know what happened to them. So we can only guess what they will do to Leonid," he said.

Selyanin said the family was approached by the Russian authorities on Sunday afternoon. "They asked for some of the details about him – nothing special," he said.

Other reports also detailed the surprise of family members of Russian soldiers at the involvement of their loved ones in a war that has been met with deep unease by many in the country.

On Saturday the independent TV channel Dozhd published an interview in which a visibly distressed father of a young Russian soldier said he did not want his son to become "cannon fodder", denying that he had any prior knowledge of his son's involvement in the conflict.

The Find Your Own Telegram channel also published a number of graphic photographs of what were said to be Russian troops killed in action. If confirmed, the images appear to shine a light on the true toll the war has had on the Russian army.

An adviser to the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said on Saturday that about 3,500 Russian soldiers had been killed or injured so far in Russia's attack on Ukraine.

On Saturday evening, Zelenskiy announced that Ukrainian and Russian delegations were planning to meet, news that was welcomed by Paktishev's family, who are desperate to see him again. "Do you think there is a chance I will see him alive?" his sister Yelena asked.

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HEADLINE	02/27 'IT army' fights Russia propaganda
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/27/ukraine-russia-war-propaganda/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine – From a hotel on a posh street in Barcelona, a 22-year-old Ukrainian in a red beanie and big black headphones is helping take down some of Russia's most powerful websites – including state media and even the official page of the Kremlin.</p> <p>Alex Horlan would prefer to be at home, preparing to confront the Russian invasion of his homeland with a gun. But when he got stuck in Spain after Ukraine's airports closed last week, he tapped into his expertise in cybersecurity to launch his own war against Russia online.</p> <p>The attacks he and others are helping to carry out on Russian websites are part of a wide information war in the background of the much larger conflict here, as Ukrainians target Russian websites to rewrite the narrative Moscow is presenting to Russians back home.</p> <p>"We are creating an IT army," Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov tweeted on Saturday.</p> <p>Horlan is a cybersecurity expert who recently launched an app called disBalancer that helps take down scam websites by overwhelming them with online traffic. He has redirected his team's efforts in recent days to instead target Russian websites he says are spreading dangerous disinformation about the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The pages they are most eager to shut down, if only temporarily, are any that suggest the Russian invasion "is not a war" or that Russia is in fact "helping the Ukrainian people," Horlan said.</p> <p>"A lot of people are dying right now and the Russian people must know it because if they don't know that, they can't even try to help," he said.</p> <p>Historically, it's been Russia that has faced accusations of hacking Ukraine. But as much of the country hunkers down at home or in bunkers, the war is increasingly playing out not just in the sky and on the ground but also on residents' laptops and phones, with much of the coordination happening on the Telegram app.</p>

The war within the war is important. Thousands of people are joining Horlan and others' efforts to target the Russian sites, with around 2,000 logging into his app at any given time, he said. The main challenge is that many are losing WiFi when air raid sirens force them to retreat to underground bunkers.

"We have two types of warriors," said Liuba Tsbulska, a Ukrainian analyst and activist who has tracked Russian disinformation for eight years. "First, military warriors, those who defend us physically. And we have information warriors, those who fight against Russian disinformation, Russian special forces psychological information operations and so on."

She said the goal of those campaigns "is to demoralize society, to spread panic, to basically break them down psychologically so they would stop supporting the army and start thinking about surrendering."

The Russian disinformation campaign, she said, has been intensifying since the Russians invaded Ukraine last week. But so has the Ukrainian response. Volunteers are gathering information on attacks and casualties to fact check and challenge Russia's version of events, she said, posting messages on Telegram and other Russian social media platforms. Others work to educate international audiences or produce patriotic content.

Some also target Russian military and intelligence officers, flooding their emails and other platforms with messages. Volunteers are reaching out to the mothers of Russian soldiers to convince them to call for Russian President Vladimir Putin to bring their boys back home.

In Kharkiv, after reports that Russian troops and armored vehicles entered Ukraine's second largest city early Sunday, one local Telegram channel with more than 400,000 subscribers urged people to continue to document the adversary's movements as a way to aid Ukraine's forces in the area.

In one message, the Truha Kharkiv channel asked citizens to "carefully film and send information about the movement of Russian troops to our channel. This is vital to the defense of our city."

Another message instructed citizens on how to make molotov cocktails.

Videos posted to social media of Ukrainians interacting with Russian troops in some cities have also served to debunk Russian propaganda claims.

In one from Melitopol, a southeastern city that Russia claimed to take under its control, a man scolds Russian troops, asking, "What are you doing here?" Meanwhile, the Russian Ministry of Defense had alleged that elderly residents greeted Russian soldiers waving red flags.

On Sunday, Telegram founder Pavel Durov warned users to carefully consider the information they read about Ukraine on the app, noting they do not have the "physical capability to check all publications on channels for accuracy."

In the capital on Sunday, the streets were eerily quiet. The only vehicles driving appeared to belong to members of the security forces and Kyiv's territorial defense forces, composed of civilians who signed up to fight and were issued weapons to protect their neighborhoods.

Their objective was to find Russian "saboteurs" who had infiltrated the city. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in a video address, said Russian units had entered Kyiv and that he was "target No. 1" followed by his family. A 36-hour curfew, starting Saturday night and ending Monday, was intended to flush out these saboteurs, Ukrainian officials said.

They urged residents to report suspicious people in their neighborhoods, including anyone wearing red armbands that they said was how the saboteurs identified each other.

In the late morning, a group from the territorial defense forces deployed in the city's center stopped an ambulance after receiving information that saboteurs were using ambulances to sow chaos, according to a hotel security guard who witnessed the stop. The militiamen checked the vehicle and let it go, satisfied that it contained medical personnel.

Later in the afternoon, Anton Herashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's Interior Ministry declared on his Telegram channel that "a group of Chechen saboteurs who were moving around Kyiv in an ambulance had just been shot by the valiant Ukrainian military intelligence officers in Kyiv, partly shot, partly detained!"

His claim could not be independently verified.

Andriy Kozinchuk, a psychologist and veteran who is now serving in the territorial defense, said he and his colleagues were forced to deploy their weapons Saturday night. "The main task was to prevent the sabotage group's activities," he said.

On the questions of saboteurs in Kyiv, Tsbulska said it could be possible that Russia is sowing disinformation to inflict fear into residents and distract the government. There have been Russian-origin messages on Telegram declaring the Chechens were coming to kill Ukrainians, she said.

But she also said it's possible the threats are real. Russia, she said, has a history of using unconventional military tactics such as disguising their soldiers in enemy uniforms or sending spies and covert operatives into enemy territories.

"They apply different techniques, and disinformation is one of the main parts of this war," she said.

Lina, an employee at the guard's hotel who requested only her first name be used for security reasons, said the Russian disinformation campaign is still going on in Donetsk, where her father lives. She recently contacted her father's neighbor to ask him to go next door and knock on her father's door and check if he was safe.

"There is no war," Lina recalled the neighbor saying. "The Russians are not fighting you."

She told him she was in the basement to keep safe from the air attacks. But he still refused to believe her, and "so I kept my mouth shut," she said. "We have different views."

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HEADLINE	02/27 China internet cheers on Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/27/business/china-russia-ukraine-invasion.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>If President Vladimir V. Putin is looking for international support and approval for his invasion of Ukraine, he can turn to the Chinese internet.</p> <p>Its users have called him "Putin the Great," "the best legacy of the former Soviet Union" and "the greatest strategist of this century." They have chastised Russians who protested against the war, saying they had been brainwashed by the United States.</p> <p>Mr. Putin's speech on Thursday, which essentially portrayed the conflict as one waged against the West, won loud cheers on Chinese social media. Many people said they were moved to tears. "If I were Russian, Putin would be my faith, my light," wrote @jinyujiyiliangxiaokou, a user of the Twitter-like platform Weibo.</p> <p>As the world overwhelmingly condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Chinese internet, for the most part, is pro-Russia, pro-war and pro-Putin.</p>

Mr. Putin's portrayal of Russia as a victim of the West's political, ideological and military aggression has resonated deeply with many on social media. It dovetails with China's narrative that the United States and its allies are afraid of China's rise and the alternative world order it could create.

For its part, the Chinese government, Russia's most powerful partner, has been more circumspect. Officials have declined to call Russia's invasion an invasion, nor have they condemned it. But they have not endorsed it, either.

Under Xi Jinping, its top leader, China has taken a more confrontational stance on foreign policy in recent years. Its [diplomats](#), the state media's [journalists](#) and some of the government's most influential advisers are far more hawkish than they used to be.

Together, they have helped to shape a generation of online warriors who view the world as a zero-sum game between China and the West, especially the United States.

A [translation](#) of Mr. Putin's speech on Thursday by a nationalistic news site went viral, to say the least. The Weibo hashtag #putin10000wordsspeechfulltext got 1.1 billion views within 24 hours.

"This is an exemplary speech of war mobilization," said one Weibo user, @apjam.

"Why was I moved to tears by the speech?" wrote @ASsicangyueliang. "Because this is also how they've been treating China."

Mostly young, nationalistic online users like these, known as "little pinks" in China, have taken their cue from the so-called "[wolf warrior](#)" [diplomats](#) who seem to relish verbal battle with journalists and their Western counterparts.

The day before Russia's invasion, for instance, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said in a daily [press briefing](#) that the United States was the "culprit" behind the tensions over Ukraine.

"When the U.S. drove five waves of NATO expansion eastward all the way to Russia's doorstep and deployed advanced offensive strategic weapons in breach of its assurances to Russia, did it ever think about the consequences of pushing a big country to the wall?" asked the spokeswoman, Hua Chunying.

The next day, as Ms. Hua was peppered with questions about whether China considered Russia's "special military operation" an invasion, she turned the [briefing](#) into a critique of the United States. "You may go ask the U.S.: they started the fire and fanned the flames," she said. "How are they going to put out the fire now?"

She bristled at the U.S. State Department's comment that China should respect [state sovereignty](#) and territorial integrity, a longstanding tenet of Chinese foreign policy.

"The U.S. is in no position to tell China off," she said. Then she mentioned the three journalists who were killed in NATO's bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999, a tragic incident that prompted widespread anti-U.S. protests in China.

"NATO still owes the Chinese people a debt of blood," she said.

That sentence became the top Weibo hashtag as Russia was bombing Ukraine. The hashtag, created by the state-run People's Daily newspaper, has been viewed more than a billion times. In posts below it, users called the United States a "warmonger" and a "paper tiger."

Other Weibo users were bemused. "If I only browsed Weibo," wrote the user @____26156, "I would have believed that it was the United States that had invaded Ukraine."

The strong pro-war sentiment online has shocked many Chinese. Some WeChat users on my timeline warned that they would block any Putin supporters. Many people shared articles about China's long, troubled history with its neighbor, including Russian annexation of Chinese territory and a border conflict with the Soviet Union in the late 1960s.

One widely shared WeChat article was titled, "All those who cheer for war are idiots," plus an expletive. "The grand narrative of nationalism and great-power chauvinism has squeezed out their last bit of humanity," the author wrote.

It was eventually deleted by WeChat for violating regulations.

The pro-Russia sentiment is [in line](#) with the two countries' growing official solidarity, culminating in a joint statement on Feb. 4, when Mr. Putin met with Mr. Xi in Beijing at the Winter Olympics.

The countries' friendship has "no limits," they declared.

Given that the leaders met just weeks before the invasion, it would be understandable to conclude that China should have had better knowledge of the Kremlin's plans. But growing evidence suggests that the echo chamber of China's foreign policy establishment might have misled not only the country's internet users, but its own officials.

My colleague Edward Wong [reported](#) that over a period of three months, senior U.S. officials held meetings with their Chinese counterparts and shared intelligence that detailed Russia's [troop buildup](#) around Ukraine. The Americans asked the Chinese officials to intervene with the Russians and tell them not to invade.

The Chinese brushed the Americans off, saying that they did not think an invasion was in the works. U.S. intelligence showed that on one occasion, Beijing shared the Americans' information with Moscow.

Recent speeches by some of China's most influential advisers to the government on international relations suggest that the miscalculation may have been based on deep distrust of the United States. They saw it as a declining power that wanted to push for war with false intelligence because it would benefit the United States, financially and strategically.

Jin Canrong, a professor at Renmin University in Beijing, told the state broadcaster China Central Television, or CCTV, on Feb. 20 that the U.S. government had been talking about imminent war because an unstable Europe would help Washington, as well the country's financial and energy industries. After the war started, he admitted to his 2.4 million Weibo followers that he was surprised.

Just before the invasion, Shen Yi, a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, ridiculed the Biden administration's predictions of war in a 52-minute video program. "Why did 'Sleepy Joe' use such poor-quality intelligence on Ukraine and Russia?" he asked, using Donald Trump's favorite nickname for President Biden.

Earlier in the week, Mr. Shen had held a conference call about the Ukraine crisis with a brokerage's clients, titled, "A war that would not be fought."

When the fighting began, he, too, acknowledged to his Weibo followers, who number 1.6 million, that he had been wrong.

Nationalistic emotions on social media were also sparked by the Chinese Embassy in Ukraine. Unlike most embassies in Kyiv, it didn't urge its citizens to evacuate. Hours into the war, it advised Chinese people to post the country's red flag conspicuously on their vehicles when traveling, indicating that it would provide protection.

Return to Top	<p>The state-owned People’s Daily, CCTV and many top government agencies posted about that on Weibo. Many people used the hashtag #theChineseredwillprotectyou, referring to the flag.</p> <p>The idea echoed a movie, the 2017 Chinese blockbuster “Wolf Warrior 2,” which ends with the hero taking fellow passengers safely through a war zone in Africa as he holds a Chinese flag high. “It’s Chinese,” an armed fighter says. “Hold your fire.”</p> <p>Two days later, the embassy reversed course, urging Chinese citizens not to display anything that would disclose their identity. Chinese people living in Ukraine advised fellow citizens not to make comments on social media that could jeopardize their security.</p> <p>As the war drags on, and especially if Beijing calibrates its position in the face of an international backlash, the online pro-Russia sentiment in China could ebb. In the meantime, other internet users are getting impatient with the nationalists.</p> <p>“Putin should enlist the Chinese little pinks and send them to the frontline,” wrote the Weibo user @xinshuiqingliu. “They’re his die-hard fans and extremely brave fighters.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 First TikTok war: influencers respond
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/feb/26/social-media-influencers-russia-ukraine-tiktok-instagram
GIST	<p>Social media influencers are often maligned for their vapidty, but as the Russian army moves across Ukraine some of Russia’s biggest digital influencers have become beacons of resistance. Many are speaking out about their unease at the speed and brutality with which the Russian president is leading his country to war. Ukrainian influencers, meanwhile, are also braving the risks of attack from the advancing army to make sure to document the horror of war in mainland Europe.</p> <p>Some of Russia’s biggest names in the digital sphere have spoken out against war. The daughter of Dmitry Peskov, Vladimir Putin’s press secretary, posted a message reading “No to war” on her Instagram story, before quickly deleting it. Max Galkin, the husband of Alla Pugacheva, and one of Russia’s biggest stars, posted a black square on Instagram and the message “Нет войне!” (“no to war!”) to his 9.4m followers.</p> <p>Fashion designer Svetlana Taccori took time out of Milan fashion week to post a photo holding a Ukrainian flag and the same message. Influencer Lova Olala painted the Russian and Ukrainian flag on each cheek and the caption “I have nothing to say”. The independent Russian journalist Ilya Varlamov has posted regular photos and videos highlighting Russian brutality, calling for a cessation of violence in Ukraine.</p> <p>Niki Proshin, a 27-year-old Russian TikToker with 750,000 followers, started posting about the invasion of Ukraine as soon as Russian troops crossed the border. He posted a single video to TikTok addressing the many questions he received from his followers asking for his thoughts on Ukraine. He spoke out about the war, and about his anger that Vladimir Putin launched the attack at night. “Showing my opinion publicly helps foreigners understand Russian people more and helps to keep the bridge between normal people outside of Russia, and normal people in Russia,” says Proshin. He followed it up with another video, taken live at street protests in his home city of St Petersburg.</p> <p>Yet many of his friends spoke out, choosing to post images of black squares on Instagram or videos speaking out against the invasion. “The current situation touched us much more than the events of the last year,” he said.</p> <p>Xenia Tchoumitcheva, born in the Russian mountain city of Magnitogorsk, chose a black and white picture of an espresso as the backdrop for her pronouncement on the invasion. “In my veins run both Russian and Ukrainian blood,” she wrote. “I don’t have any political knowledge nor opinion, but all I can say is: I am always against war and for the people,” she wrote to her 2 million followers.</p>

The risk for Russian influencers, celebrities and journalists in speaking out against the Russian dictator is obvious – those who don't toe the government line can find themselves arrested or worse, as those being arrested for protesting on the streets in Russia know well. But considering their reach, a well-timed statement to millions on Instagram or [TikTok](#) can inflict considerable reputational damage to Putin's claims of unity behind his cause.

"This is something pretty common that comes from both Ukrainian and Russian influencers," says Roman Kolodko, chief operating officer of eastern European influencer marketing agency Mediacube, which represents a number of Russian and Ukrainian creators. Kolodko spoke as he fled [Ukraine](#) for Poland. "Many big influencers are in Ukrainian cities that have been and are being attacked right now, and they need to spread their word," he added – and those who aren't have family there.

Ukrainian influencers who remain in the country have adapted their content to match the changed circumstances of their new lives under the shadow of invasion. Until yesterday, Anna Prytula's Instagram feed looked like any other relatively large influencer's: impossibly perfect cakes, overflowing bouquets of flowers and oodles of boxes and bags from Louis Vuitton lined the frame of her feed. Her lifestyle was lapped up by her million followers, 71% of whom are Ukrainian, and 16% of whom are Russian.

Then Russian boots trampled over Ukraine, and alarmingly close to Prytula's home city of Lviv. Suddenly Prytula's posts changed. Gone were the impossibly glam photos outside luxury hotels; in their place, a [stark red square](#) with white text: "at 5am Russia is attacking the territory of Ukraine". Her Instagram stories changed soon afterwards from glimpses into her glamorous life to [footage of missiles](#) raining down over her homeland, pleas to Nato to intervene, and advice on how to find help and where to hide.

As reality intrudes into the western order's way of thinking about Russia's attitude to risk, so too has the hyperreal, polished world of social media has been hit with a reality check. Ukrainian travel blogger [Elena Mandziuk](#) showed her million followers how to [make molotov cocktails](#) on her Instagram stories. [Mary Furtas](#), a Ukrainian entrepreneur with nearly 55,000 followers, pivoted her profile to post overtly political pleas on 19 February. On the day Russia invaded Ukraine, like Prytula, she posted a [similar red square](#). The text, however, was different: "Every Russian is responsible for this," she wrote.

It [hasn't escaped TikTok users' notice](#) that the app's For You feed has been filled with videos about events in Ukraine. Most people who study it believe the TikTok algorithm rewards people who are speaking about current events. Some of those are legitimate, informative videos – Ukrainian-British TikToker [Marta Vasyuta](#) has shared with the world the destructive aftermath of Russian attacks from around the country, acting as a one-woman content curation desk fuelled by righteous anger – but others are chasing likes. The app has struggled with [misrepresentative](#) or outright faked live streams and [videos](#) that are designed either to confuse or to capitalise on interest in Ukraine.

But those who are authentic will continue posting content – and for good reason. Proshin, the Russian TikToker who felt he had to speak out, says his posts aren't political, but instead connect at a human level with the rest of the world. "I hope we'll make people understand that 'Russian people' is not equal to the Russian government," he says. "Some Russian people support the political decisions of our government, but from my personal perspective, they're a minority. In this situation, 'Russia' equals 'people who can make decisions'. The majority of my friends have no power to make decisions."

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HEADLINE	02/25 Anonymous in cyberwar against Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/25/anonymous-hacking-group-waging-cyberwar-against-ru/
GIST	<p>The hacking group Anonymous is fighting the Russian government in cyberspace and is taking credit for knocking down the website for RT, the Russian-controlled news network, as the Russian military attacks Ukraine.</p> <p>The @YourAnonOne account on Twitter said Anonymous was responsible for knocking off RT and shared news on Friday that the Russian Ministry of Defense website was down as well.</p>

	<p>The Russian state-owned energy company Gazprom's website was also inaccessible on Friday and taken offline by Anonymous hackers, according to @LiteMods on Twitter, which is affiliated with Anonymous and has more than 70,000 followers.</p> <p>Accounts affiliated with the decentralized group of activist hackers shared news of their actions on Twitter and have brainstormed potential targets via the messaging platform Discord.</p> <p>"The Anonymous collective is officially in cyberwar against the Russian government. #Anonymous #Ukraine," said @YourAnonOne, an Anonymous-affiliated account on Twitter with more than 700,000 followers, on Thursday.</p> <p>The cyber action from the activist hackers was not permanent or effective everywhere. RT's website appeared back online on Friday, and Emsisoft threat analyst Brett Callow noted on Twitter that people with a Russian internet protocol address could access the website while it appeared offline to other users.</p> <p>The politically motivated hacking disrupting Russian websites on Friday is welcome news for Ukraine. According to Reuters, the Ukrainian government is encouraging the hacker underworld to protect critical infrastructure and conduct spying missions.</p> <p>Russian cybercriminals are threatening to respond to digital attacks on Russia. The ransomware gang Conti on Friday said it will act in support of Russia, according to a message shared by cybersecurity professionals on Twitter. The gang threatened to retaliate for any cyberattacks on Russia with attacks against critical infrastructure.</p> <p>Conti has previously victimized Americans. The FBI published an alert last May saying it identified 16 ransomware attacks by Conti targeting U.S. health care and first-responder networks.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Russia confirms Kremlin website down
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/world/globaltalk/kremlin-website-cyberattacks-dmitry-peskov/2022/02/26/id/1058630/
GIST	<p>With Russian forces having paused advancement Friday, potentially awaiting talks of a ceasefire, there is a sign Saturday of taking the fight back to the Kremlin.</p> <p>The official website of the Kremlin, the office of Russian President Vladimir Putin, kremlin.ru, was down Saturday, following reports of cyberattacks on various other Russian government and state media websites.</p> <p>Russian presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov confirmed constant ongoing cyberattacks were the cause of Kremlin website outage, TASS reported Saturday.</p> <p>Peskov has been prominent in the news recently because his daughter Elizaveta Peskova publicly opposed Russia's attack on Ukraine with an Instagram post that translated "no to war" in English, according to reports.</p> <p>The post was shared by her mother Katerina Peskova, but it was quickly deleted, according to reports.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Govt. access to unregulated data streams
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/durham-probe-reveals-government-access-to-unregulated-data-streams-11645871581?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	The latest developments in a high-profile criminal probe by special counsel John Durham show the extent to which the world's internet traffic is being monitored by a coterie of network researchers and security experts inside and outside the government.

Mr. Durham has been looking into the origins of the FBI's investigation into alleged ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. Recent court filings in [his case against cybersecurity lawyer](#) Michael Sussmann, as well as documents obtained by The Wall Street Journal through public records requests, show how U.S. government entities and private cybersecurity companies are able to monitor the flow of web traffic by tapping into vast quantities of data with little oversight or public awareness. Though such technical data doesn't directly reveal identities or message content, it can at times be reverse-engineered to link online activity back to specific individuals or organizations.

A [filing by prosecutors earlier this month](#) said people affiliated with [Donald Trump](#)'s 2016 Democratic rival for the presidency, Hillary Clinton, worked to exploit nonpublic internet traffic data they had access to in order to establish a narrative tying Mr. Trump to Russia. Mr. Sussmann's lawyers called the allegations misleading and irrelevant.

The monitoring is made possible by little-scrutinized partnerships, both informal and formal, among cybersecurity companies, telecommunications providers and government agencies. The U.S. government is obtaining bulk data about network usage, according to federal contracting documents and people familiar with the matter, and has fought disclosure about such activities. Academic and independent researchers are sometimes tapped to look at data and share any findings with the government without warrants or judicial authorization.

Unlike the disclosures by former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden from nearly a decade ago, which revealed U.S. intelligence programs that relied on covert access to private data streams, the sharing of internet records highlighted by Mr. Durham's probe concerns commercial information that is often being shared with or sold to the government in bulk.

Such data sets can possess enormous intelligence value, according to current and former government officials and cybersecurity experts, especially as the power of computers to derive insights from massive data sets has grown in recent years. Such network data can help governments and companies detect and counter cyberattacks. But that capability also has privacy implications, despite assurances from researchers that most of the data can't be traced back to individuals or organizations, as the traffic associated with Mr. Trump's Manhattan address was.

At issue are several kinds of internet logs showing the connections between computers, typically collected on networking devices such as switches or routers. They are the rough internet equivalent of logs of phone calls—showing which computers are connecting and when, but not necessarily revealing anything about the content of the transmissions. Modern smartphones and computers generate thousands of such logs a day just by browsing the web or using consumer apps.

Academic researchers looking at such computer logs for evidence of cybersecurity threats in 2016 grew concerned about what appeared to be computer-server connections between Mr. Trump's Manhattan tower and a Russian bank. Mr. Trump has denied any ties to Russia.

Mr. Sussmann—whose firm represented the Clinton campaign as well as a tech firm that provided some data for the research—eventually passed the researchers' findings on to the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for further investigation. He is charged with lying to the FBI about whom he was representing and has pleaded not guilty. The reason for the computer connection remains unexplained. While some independent internet experts have said the traffic appeared odd, others have offered benign technical explanations.

Julian Sanchez, a senior fellow at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute who researches privacy and technology issues, said the Durham filing highlighted the obscure ways that pools of data collected or analyzed by third parties—whether cybersecurity researchers or businesses looking to resell personal data—can land in government hands without being subjected to traditional warrant requirements.

“A question worth asking is: Who has access to large pools of telecommunications metadata, such as DNS records, and under what circumstances can those be shared with the government?” Mr. Sanchez said.

The amount of information generated and the use of artificial intelligence tools—combined with less-stringent restrictions than the laws that apply to more-direct wiretapping practices—means this data has become exponentially more valuable in recent years, he said.

“Surveillance takes the path of least resistance,” Mr. Sanchez said. Today, he said, “you have enough data and computing power that you can generate intrusive insights from data that is fairly unregulated.”

Internet traffic from Mr. Trump’s Manhattan address was part of bulk data being used by academic researchers funded in part by U.S. Defense Department grants from Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the Air Force Research Laboratory, according to documents and interviews with people familiar with the project. Manos Antonakakis, a Georgia Tech professor and the lead researcher on the project, had put together a team of experts and academics to work on hunting for cyber threats in 2016.

The grant proposals and contract documents viewed by The Wall Street Journal show that the Pentagon-funded work wasn’t related to Mr. Trump. However, according to emails released to the Journal under Georgia’s public-records law, the same team of researchers had begun work, before the official start date of the DARPA project, on a project with potential political implications.

The Georgia Tech team partnered with Neustar—a Washington-area technology and telecommunications company—to get internet logs for the DARPA project, the emails show. The DARPA funding wasn’t scheduled to begin until November 2016, but Neustar began transferring data to the Georgia Tech researchers in late July.

DARPA, through a spokesman, denied any links to the research that was turned over to federal authorities regarding Mr. Trump’s computer servers, saying any data acquired before the official start of government funding was done of Georgia Tech’s own accord.

Neustar declined to answer a detailed list of questions about its participation in the project. Georgia Tech didn’t respond to a request for comment.

At the center of the data transfers from Neustar was Rodney Joffe, a South African-born tech executive with ties to the intelligence community and the Defense Department who got his start in the direct-mail and marketing business before becoming a prominent anti-spam and cybersecurity expert. His lawyers declined to comment beyond saying he had “decades of service to the U.S. government” and the data he provided was legally acquired.

At the time of his contact with the Georgia Tech researchers, Mr. Joffe was a senior vice president and chief technology officer at Neustar, and had ties to other companies that work with government on technology-related matters.

Mr. Joffe is the owner, for instance, of Packet Forensics, a small technology firm that has a \$35 million contract with DARPA, according to federal contracting records. In 2010, the company was marketing a device to foreign and U.S. government entities that allowed them to intercept people’s internet traffic by forging security certificates. The company also offers numerous other technical services for government entities, according to its website.

According to people familiar with the matter, Mr. Joffe has long been involved in various government intelligence and cybersecurity efforts—including sometimes procuring or facilitating the acquisition of data or technological capabilities. In a 2015 interview with a Neustar employee after receiving a trade-association award, Mr. Joffe said: “I’m not the smart guy in the room. I’m really the dumb guy that carries the bags. But fortunately in those bags, I have a lot of money. So my role has really been carrying the bags of money to help whenever I can whenever folks in the community want things.”

While online, users as they move around the web generate several kinds of internet metadata of the sort used to identify communications to and from Mr. Trump’s Manhattan address. To access most sites and

services, users must connect between their computer and a server. Logs called “netflow” data provide information about where and when computers connect on the internet. And another kind of internet data called DNS data acts as a phone book for the internet—converting URLs like wsj.com into numerical IP addresses readable by computer servers.

Together, these two kinds of network data are used for widespread digital monitoring and highlight the government’s ability to look very precisely at computer connections that can sometimes be traced back to individuals or companies.

For example, an American working in China described to the Journal how the FBI warned his U.S.-based private-sector employer in 2020 about a potential cyberattack—mistaking his legitimate network connection to his company’s U.S. server as potentially nefarious. The approach occurred during the 2020 election campaign, when U.S. officials were scouring the web for potential trouble.

Jody Westby, a lawyer and cybersecurity expert representing one of the Georgia Tech researchers, said that the indictment of Mr. Sussmann would have a chilling effect on decades of constructive cooperation between private cybersecurity researchers and government.

“Because of the way the government and Durham has handled this, the cybersecurity community now is afraid to take anything to law enforcement,” Ms. Westby said. “The whole nation is at a higher risk level.”

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	02/28 Nigeria jihadists kill 27 in 4 attacks
SOURCE	https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1253464.shtml
GIST	<p>Jihadists in northeast Nigeria have since Friday killed 27 people in four separate attacks, security sources and residents told AFP on Sunday.</p> <p>The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), who split from rival Boko Haram jihadists in 2016, has escalated attacks in recent weeks, despite ongoing military operations.</p> <p>Late on Saturday, ISWAP killed 24 civilians in three villages in Borno state, an anti-jihadist militia leader and a resident told AFP.</p> <p>They said the civilians were targeted for helping troops fighting the militants.</p> <p>Military spokespeople and local officials have not yet confirmed the attacks and did not respond to AFP's requests for comment.</p> <p>The villages are on the fringes of Sambisa forest, a major jihadist hideout.</p> <p>Fighters drove into Sabongarin Kimba, Mandara-Girau and Ngama villages in Biu district, targeting residents, the sources said.</p> <p>"The terrorists killed 24 people in the three villages last night," an anti-jihadist militia leader Mustapha Karimbe said.</p> <p>"They moved from village to village, selecting their targets and slaughtering them," said Karimbe, adding that nine residents were killed in Sabongarin Kimba, seven in Mandara-Girau and eight in Ngama.</p> <p>He said soldiers had enlisted the help of villagers to clear shrubs along the highway linking the villages, which the militants use as cover for ambushes.</p>

	<p>The attacks were "punishment for the residents' aiding soldiers," he added.</p> <p>The jihadists had sent a warning to villagers not to clear the foliage threatening "grave consequences," said another militia member, Umar Ari, giving the same death toll.</p> <p>Resident of nearby Biu town, Ahmad Babagana said the militants stormed Sabongarin Kimba around 2000 GMT before proceeding to Ngama and Mandara-Girau.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Militants kill 20 civilians eastern Congo
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/suspected-islamist-militants-kill-20-civilians-eastern-congo-2022-02-28/
GIST	<p>BENI, Democratic Republic of Congo, Feb 28 (Reuters) - Suspected Islamist militants killed at least 20 civilians in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo overnight, according to a local resident and an activist who criticised the failure of Congolese and Ugandan forces to stop the repeated massacres.</p> <p>The attack late on Sunday evening in the village of Kikura was blamed by the resident and the activist on the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan militia that has killed thousands of civilians in eastern Congo since 2013.</p> <p>Congolese and Ugandan troops launched joint operations against the ADF in late November but attacks by the group, which has pledged allegiance to Islamic State, have continued to kill dozens of civilians each month.</p> <p>The assailants struck at around 9 p.m. with machetes and also burned down houses, said Odette Zawadi, the president of a local activist organisation. She said 20 bodies had been recovered and that the death toll could rise further.</p> <p>"We already didn't seem to have confidence in these so-called joint operations. How can you explain that 20 people are killed in the presence of these two forces?," she told Reuters.</p> <p>Claude Kalinde, a local resident, confirmed that 20 bodies had been recovered.</p> <p>"We thought that the coalition of the Congolese and Ugandan armies would help us, but look at how sad this is," he said.</p> <p>Capitaine Antony Mwalushayi, a spokesman for Congo's army, said it had taken a while for soldiers in the area to learn of the attack since it was carried out without firearms.</p> <p>"We cannot be discouraged because the objective of the enemy is to discourage us, to separate us from the population," he said.</p> <p>A spokesman for Uganda's army was not immediately available to comment.</p> <p>The ADF started as an uprising in Uganda but has been based in Congo since the late 1990s. It pledged allegiance to Islamic State in 2019, but United Nations researchers have found no evidence of Islamic State control over its operations.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Taliban raid houses in Kabul for weapons
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/27/taliban-raids-afghanistan/
GIST	<p>KABUL — Guns drawn, half a dozen Taliban fighters crowded into the house of a Kabul laborer Saturday. As a commander watched, his men took knives to the cushions that lined the family's sitting room, splitting them open and dumping the stuffing onto the floor. Others pulled family photos off shelves and tossed clothing out of closets.</p>

“They said they were looking for weapons,” said the laborer’s wife, who listened to the exchange from a room in the back of the house. “They said, ‘We know you had relations with the former regime.’ But my husband never worked for the government.”

The wife, like others in this report, spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. After finding nothing, the fighters beat the laborer’s adolescent son and confiscated a family car.

Such raids, part of a massive search operation launched in Kabul and surrounding districts Friday, according to the ministry of interior, mark a significant shift in how the group enforces security. When raids occurred in the past, they were generally not announced and largely conducted at night to reduce visibility. This operation is being carried out in broad daylight.

The searches began in northern Kabul, but by Saturday thousands of armed Taliban fighters fanned out into the city center, according to the spokesman for the city’s police chief, Khalid Zadran. Dressed in mismatched uniforms, some carrying rocket-propelled grenades, the men walked through residential streets, methodically combing neighborhoods, moving door to door.

“We assure the citizens of Kabul that these operations are not against the common people,” Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said in a news conference Sunday. “We have no bad intentions against anyone. These operations are against those who are thieves, kidnappers, who cause misery to our society and put the lives of Afghans in danger.”

Mujahid described the conduct of the searches as “professional,” and “well-planned.” When asked about allegations of abuse, he dismissed them as propaganda dispersed by supporters of Afghanistan’s previous government.

“You may remember the search operations carried out by the Americans and their allies with planes and helicopters that entered people’s homes at night and bombed us, killing civilians,” he said. “If we compare the current operations with that situation, our search operations are much more professional and carried out with greater caution.”

He said the operation’s aim is to improve security in Kabul and surrounding areas and create an environment more conducive to business and investment.

Over the course of three days, Taliban fighters searched thousands of houses, according to a statement released by Mujahid’s office, and confiscated hundreds of weapons, including pistols, artillery and rocket-propelled grenades.

Taliban recruits flood into Afghanistan from neighboring Pakistan as the group works to consolidate control

“People who have no criminal record should not be worried and stay with peace at their houses,” the news release from Mujahid’s office said.

But several Kabul residents described mistreatment at the hands of Taliban fighters, including destruction of property, threats and physical assault. Photographs and videos shared with The Post show rooms that appeared to have been ransacked. Kabul residents described finding upturned furniture, smashed appliances and kicked-in doors after the fighters completed their search.

Such conduct raises questions about the Taliban’s ability to maintain security while respecting civil rights.

“If abuses did happen, it was not our intended policy,” said Zadran, the Kabul police chief spokesman. “We have phone numbers to call if anyone has any complaints, and I have not received any calls.”

Taliban wages campaign of targeted killings against former members of Afghan security forces

Not all residents interviewed by The Post reported abuses. Some families said the Taliban fighters who searched their homes were polite and did not inflict any damage. Non-Afghans living in Kabul were also largely treated with respect, including foreign aid workers.

Of those who received harsher treatment during the search operations, many are members of Afghanistan's minority groups.

"The intimidations, house searches, arrests and violence against members of different ethnic groups and women are crimes and must stop immediately. Despite Putin's war we are watching you!" tweeted the European Union's ambassador to Afghanistan, Andreas von Brandt.

Increased concern among Taliban leadership regarding weapons stores and individuals sympathetic to the previous government comes with the approach of spring, which for the past two decades was Afghanistan's traditional fighting season. Just over six months since taking power, the Taliban is experiencing increased attacks in the northern province of Panjshir from forces once loyal to the previous government.

A Taliban commander dispatched to Panjshir said clashes in the area have intensified in recent weeks and, after a series of rocket attacks resulted in Taliban casualties, Kabul sent reinforcements to the valley where operations are ongoing. The commander spoke on the condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to the press. Ali Maisam Nazary, a spokesman for anti-Taliban forces in Panjshir, also reported increased clashes and Taliban casualties.

In Kabul, it is unclear when the search operations will end, according to Mujahid. But he pledged the capital will be thoroughly cleared, and there will be no need for a second sweep of this size.

"This will be the last operation," he said. "Once this operation is complete, security will come."

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HEADLINE	02/27 Disturbing future of incels
SOURCE	https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/02/27/the-disturbing-future-of-incels/
GIST	<p>How lonely social rejects banded together to create a terrifying new phenomenon, and what it could come to in the near future.</p> <p>Everybody feels lonely from time to time. But when this loneliness and isolation goes on for years or even decades, it isn't surprising that one subject to this torture would act out. It is truly terrifying to be alone for such extended periods of time, even being used as a form of torture on prisoners via solitary confinement.</p> <p>Imagine an entire group of people subject to such loneliness bonding for the sole purpose of getting back at those that have caused their social isolation and rejection.</p> <p>Unfortunately, imagination is not necessary, as a group like this is very real, and very dangerous.</p> <p>As evidenced by several terrorist attacks such as the May 2014 Isla Vista mass shooting and the 2018 Toronto van attack, the mid-2010's were just the beginning of a new type of terrorism: incel terrorism.</p> <p>Incel is short for "Involuntary Celibate", originally coined in the late 90's by a Toronto woman who wanted to make a safe space for "those who were struggling to form loving relationships". Now, Incels are a group of lonely, bitter men who blame their shortcomings on women who rejected them as well as romantically successful men.</p> <p>The Incel movement as it exists currently kicked off in 2014, after Eliot Rodger, a self-described Incel, conducted a mass shooting in Isla Vista, CA. Rodger has since been canonized among the incel community as an "incel hero". The incel community also seems to idolize other misogyny driven mass</p>

shootings such as Marc Lepine, [who conducted a mass shooting in Montreal in 1989](#), and Alek Minassian, who conducted the 2018 Toronto Van Attack (he himself admitted to [being radicalized by Incels online](#)).

The martyring of previous mass killers who were fueled by their hatred of women raises immense concern for the future of the Incel movement.

The first possibility could be that the movement will eventually fizzle out of existence over time. Since one's opinions and ideologies usually morph over the course of a lifetime, it is possible they may grow out of this line of thought. In addition, [36% of Incels reporting being between 18 and 21 and 27.9% report being between 22 and 25](#). It is entirely possible that these young men are simply too young and immature to cope well with rejection by women and other peers. However, there is no denying that they can commit heinous acts.

Another possibility is that which suggests that they may stagnate. This is unlikely, but it could be achieved through strict restrictions on popular Incel forums. Additionally, strict moderation of social media sites where Incels may spread their poisonous rhetoric is necessary, especially on sites like Reddit and Twitter. With these precautions, we could at least keep them at bay and take preventative measures to avoid any more femicides or misogyny-driven mass shootings.

The third and final possibility is that the Incel movement could spiral out of control. Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic has exacerbated social isolation due to lockdowns and quarantines, adding fuel to the already growing fire. As more young men, already feeling increasingly alienated by society, entered into extended periods of isolation, these Incel ideas seemed more attractive to them. According to The Times, [misogynistic forums dedicated to Incels has increased substantially in the past couple of months](#). What's worse, the most popular Incel forums receive [millions of visits per month](#). Because of all of these factors, this final possibility may very well be the most likely of them all.

The Incel movement is a new flavor of misogyny, which has existed for all of human history. While previous movements included [Men Going Their Own Way \(MGTOW\)](#) and other anti-feminist groups, Incels seem different. They have no affiliation to a specific group or even a political ideology (although most lean considerably to the right). All Incel attacks thus far have been self-radicalized lone wolves like Alek Minassian and Eliot Rodger. However, the trend of increasingly aggressive and violent attitudes towards women, along with the idolization of previous Incel killers, has drawn much concern.

The future looks bleak in terms of growing misogynist sentiment and Incel violence. Because of this, it is vital that mental health is prioritized across the board. Due to the stresses of current events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health has been on a steady decline for many people. Perhaps the most affected by the resulting isolation are young men, specifically those that make up the majority of self-described Incels.

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HEADLINE	02/27 Australia terrorist detained in Turkey
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10556601/Australian-ISIS-terrorist-jail-immigration-detention-no-country-wants-him.html
GIST	<p>An Australian-born Islamic State terrorist has been released from jail in Turkey but is stuck in immigration detention while he waits to see if any country will accept him.</p> <p>Melbourne-born Neil Prakash, who was raised a Buddhist, was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison in March 2019.</p> <p>He was captured by Turkish border guards in October 2016 as he tried to enter the country from Syria, and spent five years in a maximum-security prison in the city of Gaziantep.</p> <p>Prakash appeared in several propaganda videos for ISIS - encouraging attacks on Melbourne and Sydney - and took up arms for the terror group in Syria.</p>

The former rap singer was also linked to a failed Melbourne plot to behead a police officer and had connections to a number of Australian jihadis.

He was stripped of his Australian citizenship and had his passport cancelled on December 21, 2018.

This action was taken after the Turkish courts refused to extradite him to Australia to face trial.

If he had been sent to Australia, he would have faced charges related to fighting for a foreign country, a crime that could have led to a sentence of life in prison.

The Australian government said it was able to do cancel his citizenship as Prakash was entitled to Fijian citizenship through his father, who was born there, so he would not become stateless.

The 30-year-old's mother is an Australian of Cambodian descent.

The then Minister for Home Affairs Peter Dutton said the safety and security of Australia was his main priority.

'This government is determined to deal with foreign terrorist fighters as far from our shores as possible,' Mr Dutton said.

'Islamic State is opposed to Australia, our interests, values, democratic beliefs, rights and liberties.

'People should recognise if given the opportunity, Mr Prakash would harm and kill Australians,' he said.

But Fiji has said it will not recognise Prakash's citizenship, that it has no obligation to take him in, leaving the ISIS terrorist in legal limbo.

Late last year he was moved to another prison in Diyarbakir as he neared the end of his sentence, News Corp reported.

Despite having been stripped of his citizenship, the authorities there registered him as being an Australian.

With time already served, he had become eligible for parole at the end of 2021.

When he was released earlier in February, Prakash was moved to an immigration detention centre in Elbeyli, near Gaziantep Airport.

If he is to leave Turkey, the authorities need to find a country willing to take him.

With neither Australia nor Fiji wanting anything to do with him, that may take some time, despite Prakash having said he regrets his association with ISIS.

A possible third country option for him is if he still has any contact with either of the two women he claimed to have married in Syria.

Prakash may be able to use one of his wives to get citizenship of another state.

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HEADLINE	02/25 US eases some Afghanistan sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/25/us/politics/us-sanctions-afghanistan.html
GIST	WASHINGTON — The Biden administration moved on Friday to relax sanctions that have contributed to the collapse of Afghanistan's economy since the Taliban takeover in August, issuing a measure that makes clear that people can lawfully engage in transactions with the Afghan government in most circumstances.

The measure, known as a general license and announced by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, says that people can lawfully transfer money to civil servants in government agencies — including ministries now led by Taliban officials. The move covers transactions like taxes, fees, import duties and the purchase or receipt of permits, licenses or public utility services.

In a statement, Wally Adeyemo, the deputy Treasury secretary, portrayed the move as part of a larger effort by the United States to not just support the flow of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, but also to facilitate commercial and financial activity there that could allow the economy to function — without directly benefiting Islamist extremists.

“In light of this dire crisis, it is essential that we address concerns that sanctions inhibit commercial and financial activity while we continue to deny financial resources to the Taliban, the Haqqani network and other malign actors,” he said.

The measure appeared aimed at making it harder to blame the United States government's sanctions for the unfolding economic disaster in Afghanistan. The economic situation is creating a humanitarian crisis, including widespread starvation, that is spurring a huge wave of migrants to leave the country.

A senior Biden administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity in a background briefing for reporters, cautioned that many other factors were contributing to the economic collapse in Afghanistan. Those include the abrupt cutoff of huge amounts of Western foreign aid that had paid for government salaries and infrastructure projects, as well as the exodus of technocrats and others with special expertise after the Taliban swept into control.

In a statement describing the move, the Treasury Department also emphasized that theme.

“While sanctions relief alone cannot reverse longstanding structural challenges and the flight of technocratic and government experts due to the Taliban's mismanagement, it can ensure that sanctions do not prevent economic activity that the people of Afghanistan rely on to meet their most fundamental needs,” it said.

The general license excludes doing business with any entity in which the Taliban or the Haqqani network owns a majority interest. It also does not permit payments related to luxury items or services.

The Afghan central bank, known as Da Afghanistan Bank or D.A.B., is among the governing institutions that will face fewer obstacles under the measure. The central bank had formerly propped up the value of the Afghan currency by regularly auctioning United States dollars.

That activity has ceased, and the value of the Afghan currency has plunged — making food too expensive for many poor Afghans to buy. At the same time, a currency shortage has led to limits on how much those Afghans who have bank accounts may withdraw from them.

Many officials from the bank fled in August, and the Taliban has installed its own leaders to oversee it. But in the briefing, a senior administration official said the U.S. government had been exploring ideas for restarting some normal central bank activities if the bank can be made truly independent, with controls to prevent money laundering and third-party monitoring. The official said much of whether that could be done was in the hands of the Taliban.

The notion of potentially trying to resuscitate Afghanistan's central bank is in some tension with a move this month by the Biden administration regarding about \$7 billion the central bank has deposited at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, money whose fate has been a major focus since the Taliban takeover.

When the government of Afghanistan dissolved, the New York Fed made those funds unavailable for withdrawal. The Taliban have since claimed a right to them, while relatives of people killed in the Sept. 11 attacks are trying to seize the funds to pay off the Taliban's default judgment debts to them from lawsuits they had brought against the Taliban, Al Qaeda and others.

On Feb. 11, the Biden administration moved to split those funds in half — in a way that would potentially leave the Afghan central bank decapitalized. Mr. Biden invoked emergency powers to try to move \$3.5 billion into a fund that will be used for the benefit of the Afghan people. The administration left the remaining money for the Sept. 11 plaintiffs to continue pursuing in court.

It will be up to a judge to decide whether those funds can be lawfully used to pay off the Taliban's judgment debts, a question that raises several thorny and unresolved legal issues.

The Treasury Department noted that nothing in the new general license "affects the property or interests in property of Da Afghanistan Bank that are protectively blocked" pursuant to Mr. Biden's recent action.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	02/27 Pyeongchang still waits Olympic payoff
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/27/world/asia/south-korea-pyeongchang-olympics.html
GIST	<p>PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — The Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang ended four years ago, but when he drives his taxi, Jeon Jae-gu still sometimes wears a ski suit bearing the region's Olympics logo, along with a matching Pyeongchang Olympics hat.</p> <p>His trunk is stuffed with leftover trinkets that he often gives to passengers — lanyards, gloves, tote bags and figurines, all commemorating those 16 days when this rural county, one of the poorest in South Korea, was the center of the global sports world.</p> <p>"I believe the Olympics gave us a chance for a new image," Mr. Jeon said. "I heard that its harmonious effects will take 10 years to form. Slowly, slowly, slowly, time will have to pass."</p> <p>Across the hills of Pyeongchang, reminders of the 2018 Winter Games are everywhere: in banners boasting a "Peace Olympics" with North Korea; in scattered statues of the Olympic mascots, in English menus on the doors of empty restaurants that once expected a flood of foreign guests.</p> <p>One of the biggest vestiges of the Games has already begun to look like a modern ruin. The site of the 35,000-seat Olympic Stadium has become a mound of grass vaguely in the shape of an amphitheater, with a towering stadium torch remaining like a set of bones. A museum nearby preserves what's left, its display cases filled with commemorative pins, coins and clothes.</p> <p>Many see in these Olympic remnants the signs of bygone glory — and of unfulfilled promises.</p> <p>The 2018 Winter Olympics were sold to Pyeongchang's residents as a chance to cultivate global tourism that would transform the struggling region.</p> <p>South Korea spent at least \$13 billion on the Games, with some experts projecting returns on this investment of \$58 billion within 10 years. Local news outlets speculated that the Olympics could help Gangwon Province "emerge as one of the world's major winter tourist attractions."</p> <p>Yet on a recent visit to Pyeongchang, the distance from that vision and the present reality seemed immense, with Covid-related travel restrictions worsening what had already been a lackluster start to the county's post-Olympics life.</p> <p>The town surrounding Jinbu Station, built to shuttle spectators from Seoul to the Games, was eerily quiet as South Korea faced its second year of the pandemic, and as the Beijing Olympics dominated headlines.</p>

Dozens of new cafes and restaurants clustered around Jinbu's main street, most looking empty. Banners advertised new real estate developments, but shopkeepers griped about rising land prices and few buyers.

"Nothing here has really changed — only some new roads and buildings," said Shim Dal-seop, who helps run a family rice wine business. "In this town, there was no benefit to hosting the Winter Olympics."

So far, the outcome of the Pyeongchang Games "is not favorable," according to Andrew Zimbalist, a sports economist at Smith College who has studied the long-term financial and environmental impacts of hosting the Olympics. He doesn't expect it to get any better, either.

"There's always these promises — and it's particularly responded to by small-business people — that you will have all these people coming through, that you will have a booming business, and that it will sustain itself because of the exposure you get," he said. But "if you look at tourism numbers, you just don't see an upward blip in the years surrounding the Olympics" for most host countries.

Pyeongchang had a modest amount of tourism before the Games, and attractions that predated the Olympics were still drawing visitors this month, even as South Korea wrestled with a surge of Covid cases as a result of the Omicron variant.

A 22-minute drive from Jinbu, dozens of couples celebrated Valentine's Day by walking the rolling hills of Daegwallyeong Sheep Farm, long one of Pyeongchang's most popular tourist attractions, even in winter. Children cooed at sleeping lambs huddled together for warmth. In the distance, visitors could see the Olympic ski slopes laden with artificial snow.

"People come here for the exotic scenery," said Jeon Hyo-won, whose family opened the farm in 1988. "Now that most of the country is urbanized, it's not easy to feel this atmosphere of nature."

Despite the cold weather, the farm's parking lot filled up quickly. Families stopped by kiosks to buy stuffed animals and steaming potato rice cakes before hiking up the hill to see the sheep, or as Mr. Jeon calls them, his "300 children."

The farm of Mr. Jeon (no relation to the taxi driver) may be surviving, but his thoughts on the 2018 Olympics are bittersweet.

As a child in Pyeongchang in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he remembers a home without electricity and his mother washing dishes in a stream. Now, he sees the merits of all the infrastructure built for the Games, including the new bullet train line that brings people from Seoul to Gangwon in under two hours.

However, Mr. Jeon believes that many tourists take the train past Pyeongchang, on their way to the east coast, where summer activities like surfing and paragliding reign.

He said he did not notice an increase in tourists during or after the Winter Games, despite his efforts to welcome them with English and Chinese interpreters.

"The reality is very different from what was promised to us," he said. "Back then, locals here expected the Olympics to affect us a lot."

At the Alpensia Pyeongchang Resort, skiers and snowboarders glided down the mountains where athletes made their medal runs, enjoying the sprawling complex that was built ahead of South Korea's Olympic bid.

"The amount of people looks pretty similar to before the Olympics, but at least the infrastructure has improved," said Marie Boes, a freelance ski instructor from Belgium who has frequented Pyeongchang's slopes for years.

In the year after the Olympics, Pyeongchang did experience a 22 percent spike in visitors, according to South Korean news organizations. But foreigners accounted for less than 0.1 percent of the 6.1 million people who visited paid tourist attractions in the region in 2019, a Pyeongchang county government report stated.

Even before the Games began, South Korean officials expressed concern about the costs of maintaining the enormous venues being built. Some even floated the idea of turning the Olympic skating rink into a seafood freezer after the Games.

The crown jewel of the event, the \$100 million Olympics Stadium, was torn down to avoid high maintenance costs and decay.

“To me, it’s a monument of waste,” Mr. Zimbalist said.

In Gangneung, a small city that hosted the Winter Games’ ice sports competitions, an ice rink built for the Games was closed. And near the new bullet train station, a boutique hotel that once hosted Finnish athletes sat on a largely empty street of bars and motels.

Four years ago, Jeong Eui-won, owner of the Beauty Hotel, overhauled his business model to cater to foreign guests: He concocted a European-style buffet menu, installed Western beds, and hired multilingual receptionists.

“During the Olympics, I had high expectations. It felt like a very new world was unfolding,” said. “But the atmosphere changed a lot six months after the Games. The number of foreign tourists decreased.”

“It’s as though the feeling of excitement in this city has been buried,” Mr. Jeong added. “The Olympics are being forgotten.”

Still, Mr. Jeon, the taxi driver, is grateful the Winter Games came here.

“It was the best event of my life,” he said. “Wherever I go, I’ll keep wearing these clothes. I’ll wear them for the next 10 years.”

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HEADLINE	02/26 Seattle-specific seasons, types of rain
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/seattle-specific-seasons-and-the-different-types-of-rain/
GIST	<p>There are some places where rain is rain and the number of seasons is known.</p> <p>But Western Washington isn’t one of them.</p> <p>The Seattle area has so many different kinds of precipitation — drizzle, mist, showers, virga — that residents have taken to making up their names for it. Is “liquid sunshine” even used anywhere else? And it has, too, an apparently unknowable number of seasons.</p> <p>In a 2009 essay, Washington state native Jenni Whalen laid out Seattle’s six types of rain: drizzle, mist, sprinkles, “normal rain,” downpours and thunderstorms.</p> <p>Whalen described the drizzle as a slow and steady rain that can last for days but “doesn’t ruin your hair, or your outfit, or your day. It just sticks around, annoying and unassuming. And so you adapt because it’s just a drizzle.”</p> <p>Seattle-born comedian Derek Sheen said Seattle’s seasons are “like a prank show.” His understanding of them is tied to the state of one’s fleece, including “have a new fleece” and “need a new fleece.”</p> <p>In a broad sense, we really have only two seasons, wet and dry, said Logan Johnson, meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service in Seattle.</p>

Calendar people, however, claim there are four.

And residents of the Puget Sound region just can't seem to agree.

Some claim that rather than using seasons or months, it would be more accurate to use something like: [Rainy, Extra Dark and Rainy, Fake Spring](#), Disappointment, Juneuary, [Glorious Sun, Oppressive Sun](#), Four Glorious Weeks and then Wet again.

In recent years, unfortunately, the period previously known as Four Glorious Weeks — usually sometime between late August and early October when the skies are blue, the temperatures are warm (but not too hot) and the mountain and marine views dazzle — has been replaced by Smoke and Ash.

“Unfortunately, we’re seeing the divisions in weather become a lot less reliable,” said Johnson. “Heat is intruding into spring and smoke is intruding into our nicest summer months.”

Climate change has led to more fires around us in British Columbia, Canada, Eastern Washington, Oregon and California — and many wind patterns blow that smoke toward us, he said.

In addition to our latitude, which is responsible for our long dark winter nights, our weather is influenced by our proximity to the Pacific Ocean and Olympic Mountains.

Together, they are responsible for most of our weather patterns and quirks, including the [convergence zone, rain shadow \(when the mountains block the rain from getting to the other side of them\) and the size of our raindrops](#), according to Johnson.

The Pacific Ocean, which cools down and heats up more slowly than the air, is a huge moderator of our temperatures, he said. In June, the winds tend to be blowing out of the west and the ocean doesn't usually begin to warm up until the first week of July.

That's why the sixth month has that chilly Juneuary nickname and summer is said to begin July 5.

The Olympics, meanwhile, influence the amount and kind of rain seen in Seattle and the rest of the Puget Sound region.

Temperature gradients and air moisture content are the main determinants of a raindrop's characteristics while wind patterns and topography govern rainfall. These factors can combine to produce a light drizzle, a torrential rainfall, a snowstorm and every other variation of precipitation, [according to Sciencing](#).

The Washington coast gets two types of rain: stratiform and convective. From the air, stratiform precipitation looks like a sheet or a layer of tiny raindrops

Convection precipitation is formed in the more billowy clouds and occurs when air from the warmer surface of the Earth rises, sometimes to great heights. Because the force of the wind is pushing upward, tiny raindrops are not heavy enough to break through on their own, but they eventually clump together, getting “bigger and bigger and heavier and heavier” until finally they do fall, Johnson said.

Stratiform rain tends to fall evenly across a region, while convection rain can fall heavily in one place but be barely felt just blocks away.

TYPES OF RAIN DROPS

Within those two broader types of rain, there are many different types of drops.

It's known simply as rain when the drops are about 0.5 mm (0.02 inches) in diameter.

Precipitation counts as drizzle when the drops are smaller than that and virga when the drops are so small they don't reach the ground.

Sprinkles are larger than drizzles with more space between the raindrops. A sprinkle does not last long and measures only as a trace in a rain gauge, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Showers start and stop suddenly, or change intensity quickly.

TWO TYPES OF RAIN

The two types can sometimes be mixed together, Johnson said, but convection rain usually doesn't make its way inland across the mountains.

That's why Seattleites tend to think of drizzle as their most common rain and perhaps also why they've [historically preferred hoods to umbrellas](#).

TEMPERATURE AND RAIN

When both the temperature in the clouds and that on the ground are below the freezing point of water, 0 degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit), condensed water droplets become ice crystals and fall to the ground as snow.

Sleet occurs when the temperature in the clouds is warmer than that on the ground. Condensation falls as rain and partially freezes, and the precipitation that reaches the ground is a mixture of snow and water. Graupel consists of soft, small pellets of hail that form when water droplets freeze over a crystal of snow.

Sometimes rain encounters a layer of freezing air on its way to the ground and solidifies into raindrop-sized — or larger — ice pellets known as hailstones. They can pelt the ground even if the ground temperature is above freezing. Hail is a common feature of severe summer thunderstorms.

The upcoming season, known elsewhere as spring, is a gag gift, said comedian Sheen. It lures us out of our lairs with a bit of blue sky and the promise of warmth.

We go outside, he said, shedding our heavy jackets, baring our legs, lifting our squinty eyes to the sun. Maybe we even feel our spirits and hopes rise.

“Then smack!” he said. ” In the second week of April it starts raining and it doesn't stop till June.”

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HEADLINE	02/26 Studies: Wuhan market pandemic origin
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/02/26/science/covid-virus-wuhan-origins.html
GIST	<p>Scientists released a pair of extensive studies on Saturday that point to a market in Wuhan, China, as the origin of the coronavirus pandemic. The two reports, totalling about 150 pages, have not yet been published in a scientific journal.</p> <p>The researchers analyzed data from a range of sources to look for clues to how the pandemic arose. They concluded that the coronavirus was present in live mammals sold in the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in late 2019. The research suggests that the virus very likely twice spilled over into people working or shopping at the market. The researchers said they found no support for an alternate hypothesis that the coronavirus escaped from a lab in Wuhan.</p> <p>“When you look at all of the evidence together, it’s an extraordinarily clear picture that the pandemic started at the Huanan market,” said Michael Worobey, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona and a co-author of both studies.</p> <p>The authors of the new study include researchers who previously published smaller reports that had pointed towards a similar conclusion, but based on much less detail.</p>

	<p>Many of the first cases of Covid-19 clustered around the Huanan market. By the end of December 2019, hospitals in Wuhan had found dozens of cases of viral pneumonia.</p> <p>The market was closed on Jan. 1, 2020, the same day that hundreds of thousands of people left Wuhan to travel back to their hometowns for the Lunar New Year. Millions more left the city in January, seeding local outbreaks across China.</p> <p><i>This is a developing story</i></p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Sea level rise Puget Sound, WA coast
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/what-new-projections-of-sea-level-rise-mean-for-puget-sound-and-the-wa-coast/
GIST	<p>Sea level rise will affect each area of the planet in a unique way, but new projections are helping researchers and lawmakers in Washington state identify which coastal communities are most vulnerable.</p> <p>A new report published earlier this month by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says sea levels will rise 10 to 12 inches in the contiguous U.S. by 2050 — with regional variations — which scientists say would trigger a “profound increase” in coastal flooding.</p> <p>The Washington coast could see as much sea level rise — 4 to 6 inches — in the next three decades as it did in the previous century.</p> <p>By the end of the century, the state could see nearly 3 feet in average sea level rise, according to the new projections, a jump from 2 feet in past studies.</p> <p>The state has many vulnerable places, including coastal and low-lying areas in and around Neah Bay, Port Angeles, Seattle and Cherry Point.</p> <p>The new report is “sobering,” King County Climate Preparedness Program Manager Lara Whitely Binder said in an email.</p> <p>The NOAA report “reaffirms the importance of planning for sea level rise in King County,” she said. “The new report increases my confidence that we are planning for the right amount of sea level rise — based on what we know now.”</p> <p>According to projections from 2018 by the Washington Coastal Resilience Project, King County is expecting 2 to 3 feet of sea level rise — and up to 5 feet — by 2100.</p> <p>While the East and Gulf coasts are expected to see the most sea level rise, experts say the preparedness of coastal communities — not so much the amount or frequency of environmental change — will determine how much damage they suffer.</p> <p>“The impacts associated with sea level rise in a coastal community, and the vulnerability of a coastal community to those impacts, aren’t directly tied to the magnitude of change,” said Ian Miller, a coastal hazards specialist with Washington Sea Grant of the University of Washington.</p> <p>Miller works with coastal communities on the Olympic Peninsula to help them prepare for tsunamis, erosion, flooding and other natural risks exacerbated by climate change.</p> <p>“What this [NOAA] report doesn’t do is evaluate the impacts of 9 inches of sea level rise here versus 15 on the Gulf Coast,” he said. “It’s not inconceivable that the impacts we may experience might be more despite the fact that the sea level rise we’re seeing is less.”</p>

Depending on topography, ocean behavior and infrastructure, increases in sea level can lead to increases in flooding, storm surges, permanent submergence of low-lying areas, erosion, saltwater corrosion and habitat loss.

Seattle has seen more than 9 inches in sea level rise since 1899 based on measurements by a NOAA tide gauge located at Colman Dock, [according to King County](#).

The new report estimates it will see about that much rise [by 2050](#).

While variables make it difficult to predict exactly how much levels will rise, especially past 2050, improvements in technology and sampling data will help scientists narrow down the margin of possible scenarios.

The local impacts of rising seas are many.

Previous reports predicted an uptick in flooding across low-lying areas in Seattle, Tacoma and Olympia. In addition, nearly 70% of Washington's tidal wetlands could disappear by 2100 and historic flooding that has occurred every century could become more frequent and more devastating.

In 2020, King County [updated](#) its comprehensive plan to establish a sea level rise risk area on Vashon and Maury islands.

Washington lawmakers are urging for more.

"Coastal communities in Washington state are extremely vulnerable to sea level rise and coastal hazards and that's why we must continue to push forward to help communities construct climate resilient infrastructure and habitat," Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., said in a statement. "We have to ensure that our coastal communities have the tools and resources to prepare and adapt to climate change and sea level rise."

NOAA pushes for local changes

The damage caused by a rising sea will be costly, said Nicole LeBoeuf, director of NOAA's National Ocean Service, adding that 40% of U.S. residents live along the coast.

"By 2050, the expected relative sea level will cause tide and storm surge heights to increase and will lead to a shift in U.S. coastal flood regimes, with major and moderate high tide flood events occurring as frequently as moderate and minor high tide flood events occur today," the report states. "Without additional risk-reduction measures, U.S. coastal infrastructure, communities, and ecosystems will face significant consequences."

And yet, scientists believe the worst won't come until after 2100 when glacial melting near Antarctica and Greenland are predicted to begin affecting long-term sea level rise.

Estimates in the report, however, are "driven by uncertainty in future emissions pathways and the response of the underlying physical processes."

The research led by NOAA provided a current projection of expected sea level rise — in relation to sea level in 2000 — in the U.S. coastline for every decade until 2150.

"This is a global wake-up call and gives Americans the information needed to act now to best position ourselves for the future," NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad said. "These updated data can inform coastal communities and others about current and future vulnerabilities in the face of climate change and help them make smart decisions to keep people and property safe over the long run."

	<p>NASA's Sea Level Change Team helped create the updated report by building upon a 2017 study using data from the Sixth Assessment Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released in August 2021.</p> <p>Still, many things remain uncertain. The disintegration of ice shelves, ground uplift and the trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions over the next several decades, among many other things, will largely determine sea level rise.</p> <p>The elephant in the room, said Guillaume Mauger of the UW Climate Impacts Group, is when, how and to what degree glaciers in Antarctica and Greenland melt.</p> <p>While sea level rise until 2050 is effectively locked in because of past emissions, what happens after that will be influenced by efforts to reduce carbon emissions.</p> <p>"Even if we could magically turn off greenhouse gases tomorrow, we're kind of stuck with what we're going to get by 2050," Mauger said. "What we see at the end of the century ... is strongly dependent on how much we emit between now and then."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Washington's benchmark glacier melting
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/washingtons-glaciers-melting/281-b69f0fee-5e4d-4a37-b59a-b7fdbffc6e03
GIST	<p>NORTH CASCADE, Wash. — Washington state's glaciers are not only shrinking but melting away entirely.</p> <p>The National Park Service has studied glaciers for more than a century in Mount Rainier, Olympic and North Cascades national parks. The Olympics and North Cascades have lost more than half their ice since 1900. Rainier has lost 3%.</p> <p>Yet the amount of loss since the late 1970s has accelerated, based on National Park Service surveys of these mountain glaciers.</p> <p>The loss at Mount Rainier is less alarming, largely because at 14,411 feet, much of its glaciers are at higher and colder altitudes. But according to NPS glaciologist Mike Larabee, glaciers that do not extend to the top of the mountain have significantly more loss.</p> <p>One glacier that is classified as a benchmark by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is the South Cascade Glacier, which ironically is located in the northern Cascade mountains but outside of the national park. Its meltwater flows into the Skagit River near Marblemount. It's called a benchmark because what happens on it can be inferred to other glaciers in the state.</p> <p>The USGS has five benchmark glaciers. Three are in Alaska and a fourth is Sperry Glacier in Glacier National Park in Montana, which Stevens points out is also quickly losing mass.</p> <p>South Cascade Glacier has been studied by USGS in detail since the late 1950s. Glaciologist Max Stevens says the glacier has shrunk back by about a half-mile since then.</p> <p>But glaciers are not only measured by how long they are and how much area they cover, but how thick they are - their mass - which is also shrinking.</p> <p>"We go out every spring and measure how much snow fell at several sites on the glacier to get a representative sample," Stevens said.</p> <p>They also go out back in the late summer or early fall, drill exploratory holes, weigh ice samples, and establish and monitor localized weather stations on the ice.</p>

	<p>“South Cascade Glacier is a little bit more than twice the size of Green Lake [Glacier] and it’s about 650 feet thick. That’s about the height of the Space Needle, and each year we’re taking about 2 feet off the top of that,” Stevens said.</p> <p>That 2 feet is an average. Less ice is lost at the upper elevations of glaciers and more at the lower portions where more melting occurs.</p> <p>Glaciers are not fixed in place. They are rivers of ice that flow. When a glacier gains as much snow at the top as the amount of ice that will melt at the bottom, it’s considered mass balance. During colder periods glaciers have gained mass. But that hasn’t happened recently.</p> <p>The South Cascade Glacier has seen a "net loss of mass" over the past decade, according to Stevens.</p> <p>"Glaciers are a big part of water resources in the northwest," he said, and that’s the mission the USGS has in telling farmers, electrical utilities, fish biologists and others about what they can expect. After all, glacial melt is a big part of the ecosystem in many Washington rivers. “As far as climate change goes, I hope that people who are making decisions around climate change are able to use our data to inform their decisions.”</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	02/27 California officer shot, killed in traffic stop
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/02/27/Salinas-Police-shooting/1241645975296/
GIST	<p>Feb. 27 (UPI) -- A traffic stop in Central California turned deadly after the subject in the stop opened fire, killing a police officer, authorities said.</p> <p>Salinas police officer Jorge David "JD" Alvarado, 30, died in the Friday night shooting, the department announced Saturday.</p> <p>"Officer Alvarado's heroic action during the confrontation directly led to the arrest of the suspect," a statement on the Salinas Police Department's Facebook page said.</p> <p>Alvarado was a five-year veteran on the force.</p> <p>Authorities declined to release information about the suspect, only saying the person is in custody.</p> <p>The Monterey County Weekly reported that Alvarado's death was the first Salinas police officer killed in the line of duty in nearly 80 years.</p> <p>"A tragedy such as this -- the death of an officer while performing his duties -- takes a huge toll on a police department," Monterey County District Attorney Jeannine Pacioni said during a news conference Saturday.</p> <p>Salinas is located about 60 miles south of San Jose and is the county seat and most populous city in Monterey County.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Europol report: human trafficking
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/europol-report-reveals-the-changing-face-of-human-trafficking-and-migrant-smuggling/

GIST	<p>Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented travel restrictions, criminal networks active in illegal immigration and human trafficking have continued to thrive, displaying a high degree of adaptability. New emerging routes, new technologies and new modus operandi have forced law enforcement agencies to be better prepared and more vigilant than ever.</p> <p>Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre's sixth annual report provides an overview of recent activities and outlines recommendations for the ways in which Europol can bolster Europe's security and help Member States effectively combat organized crime.</p> <p>2021 has seen an increase in the role that digital technologies play in migrant smuggling and the trafficking of human beings. Migrant smugglers have expanded their use of social media platforms and mobile applications in order to offer their illegal services. Human traffickers have abused the anonymity of the internet environment to target vulnerable individuals and then exploit them via both escort websites and even dating platforms.</p> <p>The report notes that migratory pressure on the eastern borders route via Belarus has influenced the increase of the presence of criminal networks facilitating secondary movement along that route.</p> <p>Other trends from 2021 include almost double the smuggling activities on the passage by sea to Italy. In addition, the fee for this journey jumped from EUR 6,000 to EUR 12,000.</p> <p>Increased poly-criminality of migrant smuggling networks active along the Western Mediterranean and Western African routes has also been recorded.</p> <p>In response, Europol coordinated the first referral action day targeting the facilitation of illegal immigration services offered online, amongst other responses. In total, Europol supported 6,139 new investigations of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in 2021. Some 26 high-value targets were identified.</p> <p>For example, an investigation carried out between French, Romanian and Moldovan authorities, supported by Europol and Eurojust, led to the dismantlement of an organized crime group involved in migrant smuggling, human trafficking for labour exploitation, document fraud, social benefit fraud and money laundering. The criminal network smuggled and registered Moldovan workers in France with fake documents while keeping their real passports as a guarantee. Illicit profits were estimated around EUR 14 million. During the operations, simultaneous raids were carried out in France, Romania and Moldova and 51 locations were searched in the three countries. Authorities froze 11 bank accounts, arrested 38 suspects and seized, among others, 19 vehicles including 15 high-end cars, 2 jet skis, weapons, phones, and roughly EUR 100,000 in cash.</p> <p>The report also warns that the increase in demand, and the resultant rise in profits, has led to further professionalization of the smuggling networks behind irregular migration and human trafficking. With this comes an increased risk of violence, as groups vie for control of smuggling routes and increasingly use aggression against law enforcement.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Police: man shot, killed downtown Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-investigating-after-man-shot-killed-downtown-seattle/3CRV3NLMLBF5TCC4G6IJERM4SM/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle police are investigating after a man was shot and killed Sunday afternoon.</p> <p>Officers responded to the area of Third Avenue and Pine Street for reports of a shooting at about 12:30 p.m.</p>

	<p>Upon arriving at the scene, police found a man with multiple gunshot wounds in the 200 block of Pine Street.</p> <p>Officers and Seattle Fire Department medics attempted lifesaving measures, but the man was declared deceased at the scene.</p> <p>The victim was approximately 45 years old, according to SFD.</p> <p>Homicide detectives and members of the SPD crime scene investigation unit responded to the scene to collect and process evidence.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Seattle bakery closes: excessive crime
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/downtown-seattle-bakery-closes-citing-excessive-crime-after-fatal-shooting-sunday/
GIST	<p>It wasn't just the fatal shooting Sunday that led Olga Sagan to close her Piroshky Piroshky bakery in downtown Seattle.</p> <p>Last week someone was shot and injured near the bakery's location near Third Avenue and Pike Street, Sagan said. When she tried to open the store Saturday, she found people using drugs at the entrance who refused to move. Private security couldn't get them to relocate. She called police, she said, but no one responded. The store, which serves traditional Russian pastries, remained closed.</p> <p>On Sunday afternoon, a man was shot to death around the block from the bakery. That's when Sagan told employees she was closing the bakery and will try to find jobs for them at other locations, adding that she hopes to reopen when it is safe.</p> <p>"How many shootings do we need to have to realize this is an active emergency in downtown Seattle?" she said in an interview. "The streets of downtown have been abandoned by government," she said, "and handed over to criminal activity."</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department didn't have a comment about Sagan's concerns as of Sunday evening. Police detectives were investigating the shooting death Sunday of a man near Third Avenue and Pine Street. Officers found the man with multiple gunshot wounds around 12:30 p.m., according to Detective Valerie Carson.</p> <p>"Officers and Seattle Fire Department medics both attempted lifesaving measures but the man was declared deceased at the scene," she said, adding that she had no further information about the crime.</p> <p>For Sagan, crime along Third Avenue downtown has become a more frequent, and graver, concern since reopening the downtown location of Piroshky Piroshky last September. Business at the restaurant's location in Pike Place Market, which remains open, has rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, she said. Sales at the Third Avenue store were down about 85%.</p> <p>Sagan emphasized that her concern is with crime, not homelessness, and that the criminal activity alone drove her decision to close. "I really don't want to wait until my employees get shot, or my customers get shot," she said. "I feel it's not far-fetched right now."</p> <p>In early February, Sagan invited Ann Davison, Seattle's newly elected city attorney, to accompany her on her route walking to and from work. She prefers the route with more street trash that has more security and lighting.</p> <p>"It feels safer, but still, it's always drug use and people shouting at you whichever way you walk," she said at the time.</p>

	Davison has pledged to prosecute misdemeanors more often and more quickly. Yet even in the last few weeks, Sagan said, the level of crime intensified and she felt a sense of hopelessness.
	“This is just too dangerous,” Sagan said Sunday.
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HEADLINE	02/23 Waco biker shootout 9 dead, no convictions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/23/magazine/waco-biker-shootout.html
GIST	<p>If you ask Paul Looney, a Houston defense attorney, about the Twin Peaks biker case, he'll tell you there's one person who knows more about it than anyone else alive: his trial-preparation specialist, Roxanne Avery. An entire wall of her home office in Norman, Okla., is covered with wallet-size mug shots of the nearly 200 bikers arrested, as well as photographs of the nine men who died that day, seven years ago, after a violent brawl in a Waco parking lot. Each picture is layered with Post-it Notes and details about the subjects: ages, road names (Cheech, Chain, Drama, Sidetrack, Saint, Mad Dog, Pee Paw, Bubba, Bubba Earl, Bashful, Yogi, Reno, Creeper, Grumpy Dan), club affiliations, ranks, descriptions of injuries (“Bullet entered neck, partially exited”; “Paralyzed from the waist down”; “DEAD”) and any other pertinent information (“I met him March 2018”; “9mm Glock”; “U.S. Army — 2 tours Iraq”; “Convicted felon”; “Shot dog?”; “Did not see anything”; “Graduate Baylor University w/ English degree”). Point to a random photograph, and Avery will generally be able to squint and tell you something about the biker in question.</p> <p>“There’s a rumor that he killed somebody,” she said one morning two years ago, tapping a face. “I don’t think it’s true. I know these guys.” She wore a large black onyx ring and brilliant cherry red lipstick; one of her Chihuahuas, Bonnie, padded by in a white dress with a red bow. Moving to a large computer monitor, Avery began to click through crime-scene photographs, many of them graphic close-ups of dead bodies. “So he’s got a gunshot wound that you see is in his face and his eye,” she noted, pausing at a particularly grisly image. “The other one entered through his back and exited out.”</p> <p>Avery and her boss make a colorful duo. Looney speaks in a mellifluous Texas drawl, wears bolo ties and cowboy boots and pilots his own plane to court hearings outside Houston. “I’ve always been this close to being a criminal myself,” he told me. “I could have either become a Mafioso don or a criminal defense lawyer, but there was no place that I could apply my personality effectively except those two places.” Looney has appeared before courts in 41 states; he has done “a whole bunch of work” for drug cartels, he explained, and their people get arrested all over the country. Avery likes to make “Better Call Paul” jokes.</p> <p>They met in 2002, when Avery needed a lawyer herself. After her husband, an OB-GYN, died of a heart attack, she hired other doctors and continued to own and operate his clinic — until a competitor reported her to local authorities for practicing medicine without a license. Her best friend put her in touch with Looney, who flew out and cleared up the matter. Avery began to work for him in 2013, writing news releases and sitting second chair at trial as his discovery expert. She was initially put off by the idea of defending people who might well be guilty. But she had always been drawn to true-crime stories — her grandparents’ farm in Kansas wasn’t far from the Clutters’, made infamous by “In Cold Blood,” and her mother used to tell her stories about how nobody in town liked Truman Capote — so the job wound up suiting her.</p> <p>She was the one who told Looney about the Waco brawl in the first place. In May 2015, the bikers were gathering for a meeting of the Texas Confederation of Clubs and Independents, a coalition of motorcycle enthusiasts that lobbies the state government over things like helmet laws. These meetings were typically low-key affairs; the Waco event was planned for 1 p.m. on a Sunday, at a Hooters-style chain restaurant called Twin Peaks, where the waitresses wear lumberjack-plaid halter tops. But this meeting was preceded by rumblings of an escalating feud between two of the state’s biggest “outlaw” motorcycle clubs, the Cossacks and the Bandidos.</p> <p>Moments after the Bandidos arrived at Twin Peaks, a fistfight broke out, followed by gunfire, then utter havoc. One Waco police officer described the aftermath as looking like something “out of a video game.” Bloodstained concrete. Guns, knives, brass knuckles and batons scattered across the scene. Nine dead, 20 wounded. “In 34 years of law enforcement,” a spokesperson for the Waco Police Department told</p>

reporters, it was “the most violent crime scene I have ever been involved in.” The police ended up arresting 177 bikers, [an event described in this newspaper](#) as “what appears to be the largest roundup and mass arrest of bikers in recent American history.”

The event quickly became a national story. Like the average news consumer, Looney first reacted to all this with astonishment: Sunday afternoon, gunfire everywhere, *nine dead*?

But as he followed the narrative over the next week, he became suspicious. The 177 arrests seemed awfully high, and all the bikers, regardless of the evidence against them, were slapped with identical felony charges and million-dollar bonds. “I just couldn’t believe it,” Looney told me. “It defied credibility.” While the D.A.’s office issued news releases and mug shots of the bikers were splashed across newspapers throughout the state, Looney said he “saw nobody stepping forward to counter the narrative,” one that was “completely damning” the accused. “And I just felt like somebody needed to get in there with a bunch of resources and change the narrative and get to the bottom of what’s happening.”

The following weekend, [Houston experienced catastrophic flooding](#), which closed the courthouses and suddenly freed up Looney’s schedule. “So I gathered up Roxanne and told her: ‘Let’s go to Waco. We’ve got to find a client,’” Looney recalled. Avery, who remembers herself being the instigator of the trip, worked her phone over the course of the three-hour drive, eventually making contact with the mother of a man named William English, who was arrested in the roundup along with his wife, Morgan. William was 33, a laid-off welder and Marine Corps veteran who served in Iraq. His motorcycle club, the Distorted, had seven total members. His only previous arrest was for driving under the influence; Morgan had no criminal record. Because of bad weather, they drove to the C.O.C. meeting in a Nissan Sentra. They hadn’t even put their names on the restaurant wait-list yet when the shooting started.

Looney had gone to Waco before, including once, back in the 1990s, to represent a defendant in the siege of the Branch Davidian compound. “I wanted in on that trial so badly,” he recalls. But on the second day of that client’s incarceration, Looney filed a motion to suppress the evidence, and the U.S. attorney’s office concurred, and the client went free. “I got shut out early,” he says, still sounding rueful. With the bikers, he told Avery, he didn’t want to miss his chance.

Less than three months before the Waco brawl, the Texas Department of Public Safety issued an internal memo warning that the Bandidos were “displeased” with the Cossacks. On March 22, a man named Arthur Young stopped for gas in Gordon, Texas, wearing his Cossacks vest; while he was filling up his Harley-Davidson, he said, between 10 and 15 men in Bandidos vests and T-shirts pulled up and ordered him to remove it. When he refused, they beat him with fists and a claw hammer, leaving him with a head wound requiring 12 staples. The same day, a group of Cossacks forced a Bandido off I-35 and beat him with a chain, pipe and baton before stealing his motorcycle. Those incidents, the D.P.S. bulletin concluded, “confirm that tensions between the Bandidos and the Cossacks remain high in the area and can escalate at any time.”

One Cossack (he requested anonymity; call him W., his first initial) received his own warning about the meeting. He can rattle off the date he joined the club without hesitation, like one of his kids’ birthdays — and by the time of the meeting, he had become a sergeant-at-arms, in charge of security, which made his presence in Waco mandatory. W. called his team of enforcers “coolers,” a homage to “Road House,” the Patrick Swayze movie about bouncers. “We’re not bouncing heads,” he said. “We’re cooling them. Until you put us in a position where we can’t.” A source called him, the night before the meeting, to say that “something might kick up.”

On Sunday morning, a group gathered at the clubhouse of the Bandidos’ Dallas chapter. It included Jake Carrizal, the 33-year-old vice president of the chapter, a railroad engineer with copious tattoos and a long beard, the type of guy who wouldn’t look entirely out of place selling artisanal sourdough at a farmers’ market. Earlier, he sent a text: “Bring your tools, guys.” That morning, he slipped a Derringer two-shot into his back pocket holster, hidden by a vest with patches reading “Expect No Mercy” and “Malandro” (Spanish slang for “bad guy”), along with a pair of SS lightning bolts. (Outlaw motorcycle clubs are exclusively male and also tend to be segregated into Black and white groups, though the Bandidos have

Latino members, such as Carrizal.) Later, asked about the vest in court, Carrizal insisted: “You’re using our patches and our culture literally against us. It’s not meant to be as literal as law enforcement is taking it.”

The Waco Police Department did indeed seem to be taking the bikers both literally and seriously. Earlier in the month, Jeff Rogers, a detective with the gang-intelligence unit, sent out his own email warning colleagues that “if the Cossacks attempt to attend this meeting or show up at this location, the potential for violence is very high.” Shortly after Kelly Bowden, a 19-year-old bartender at Twin Peaks, arrived for her lunch shift, her manager told her that the cops had called corporate and tried to get them to cancel the meeting entirely. I guess they didn’t realize we’re a franchise store, the manager said.

The restaurant was located in a sprawling strip mall alongside big-box chains such as Bed Bath & Beyond. The Cossacks began arriving early, along with so-called support clubs, smaller groups affiliated with one or the other of the bigger gangs. There were also members of unaffiliated clubs, like the Christian Motorcyclists Association, interdenominational evangelizers among the biker community. The Vise Grips, from Austin, showed up on beautifully restored pre-1970s Harleys.

Jacquelin Ganske, a server, happened to be on the patio near some Cossacks when the Bandidos arrived, with Carrizal and his uncle, the president of the Dallas chapter, leading the pack. “I looked across and saw it was Dallas,” W. told me, “and I’m going, ‘Wait a minute, Dallas don’t normally do C.O.C.’ I went around to my sergeants-at-arms and said, ‘Guys, be alert, find your perimeter.’” When Ganske asked what was going on, someone told her to shut up.

The franchise operator had nixed the idea of having off-duty police patrol biker events. Instead, the police positioned uniformed officers — mostly members of the SWAT team — in the parking lot, hoping their visibility might act as a deterrent. Two of them, Michael Bucher and Heath Jackson, arrived to find between 75 and 100 bikers in the lot behind the restaurant, many wearing Bandidos red and gold, most with knives on their belts. Some, Bucher later claimed, seemed to be stretching, limbering up. When Rogers came on the radio and said there appeared to be some tension at the front of the restaurant, Bucher drove around and found about 200 bikers by the patio, arranged in a way that reminded him of a football team huddled around a coach. He saw a Cossack push a Bandido at the edge of the crowd.

Another server, Jessica Drewry, tried to deliver some beers to the patio, but a Cossack stopped her. Shaniqua Corsey, busing tables, glanced through a window and spotted a biker in a yellow helmet engaged in a heated argument. His face was red. He pulled out a silver revolver with a long barrel that reminded her of Dirty Harry’s gun. When he opened fire, Corsey ducked below a table. She heard a second shot. “Then,” she would write in her police statement, “it was like go-time!”

On Bucher’s dashcam video, you see a biker toward the right of the frame throw a punch. More punches follow. Then the crowd pulses, like a single organism, before scattering as the first gunshot is fired. Bikers run in every direction, taking cover behind vehicles, dropping to their bellies. As Jackson, a Marine Corps veteran, exited the patrol vehicle with his rifle, a round struck the door frame. Amid the chaos, he would later report, he saw a man calmly aiming a revolver as if preparing to execute someone on the ground. Jackson decided to take a head shot. On the video, you can see a man pointing a gun in the manner described by Jackson before abruptly dropping.

Bucher, an Army veteran, was using his door for cover as bullets whizzed past. He shot a biker who had been firing a gun, following the man to the ground with his scope. The man kept firing, so Bucher shot him again, in the head. Bikers were grappling and fistfighting, stabbing one another, running for cover. Bucher saw one walk up to someone on the ground and shoot him, point blank, before disappearing behind a truck.

Inside the restaurant, customers and staff were scrambling toward the kitchen, where many hid inside a walk-in freezer. Outside, the video caught a big man with long hair swinging a chain, then dropping to the ground after being shot in the leg. Two men briefly pummeled him before running.

The firefight lasted for only about two minutes. In the end, bullet fragments from police weapons would be found in the bodies of four of the nine bikers killed — though some also contained fragments of bullets from other guns, making the source of the fatal shots unclear. (A grand jury found the officers not guilty of any wrongdoing in 2016.) As police officers secured the scene, the bikers raised their hands in surrender or sprawled prone with their hands on their heads. Some cried out for help. Others tried to perform CPR on the wounded. Rock music continued to blare, eerily, from the restaurant's sound system.

Large gatherings of bikers have been a source of anxiety for Americans since at least 1947, when up to 4,000 motorcyclists showed up for a rally in Hollister, Calif. The possibly sensationalized reports of what became known as the Hollister Riot included drunkenness, indecent exposure and the riding of motorcycles through restaurants and bars; they would inspire the short story that became "The Wild One," the 1953 film in which Marlon Brando's Black Rebels Motorcycle Club terrorizes square townies. There was a line, often attributed to the American Motorcycle Association, reassuring the nation that 99 percent of riders were law-abiding. But this statistic would eventually be turned "back on itself," as the biker historian William L. Dulaney has written, by "a loose association of *truly* outlaw motorcycle clubs known as One Percenters."

The best known of the 1 percent clubs, the Hells Angels, was started in Fontana, Calif., in 1948. The Bandidos came along 18 years later in 1966, founded by a 36-year-old Houston dockworker and Vietnam War veteran named Donald Chambers. One early member told Skip Hollandsworth of Texas Monthly that many of them read Hunter S. Thompson's just-published "Hell's Angels" as a sort of how-to manual. Chambers's leadership ended in 1972, when he received two consecutive life sentences for murdering a pair of drug dealers who tried to sell him baking soda as meth.

In 1981, an Austin police lieutenant told Newsweek that the Bandidos were "the single greatest organized-crime problem in Texas." By this point, some members carried business cards reading, "We are the people our parents warned us about." Dick Reavis, another [Texas Monthly writer, did an article on the Bandidos in 1979](#), growing so close to members of the Fort Worth chapter that they invited him to prospect with the group. (A prospect is a probationary member. "I call them pledges," Avery told me, "because I'm used to sororities.") Reavis wasn't so sure how organized the crime ever became, but he estimated that at least a third of the Bandidos he knew engaged in some sort of illegal activity (burglary, selling drugs, "driving hot cargo"), and he found violence endemic to the subculture. The Fort Worth chapter's president was killed weeks before Reavis's arrival; two others featured in his article would be shot within the year.

The case made by the U.S. Justice Department in its successful 1988 prosecution of Ronald Hodge, Chambers's successor, suggested more of a top-down structure. Hodge, prosecutors said, ordered subordinates to collect \$100 from every member of the group to fund an elaborate revenge plot against a rival club, the Banshees, meant to include a machine-gun attack on a clubhouse in Texarkana and the bombing of homes and vehicles in Dallas.

Prosecutions of Bandidos leadership would continue, but the organization expanded. By 2015, the Justice Department estimated a membership between 1,500 and 2,000. "Depending on who you talked to at that time, they were either the largest or second-largest outlaw motorcycle organization in the world, after the Hells Angels," says Eric Fuchs, the assistant U.S. attorney who headed a 2018 case against the Bandidos' president, Jeff Pike, and vice president, John Portillo. The Texas Department of Public Safety ranks the Bandidos as a Tier 2 gang, alongside the Crips, Bloods, Latin Kings and Aryan Brotherhood of Texas. According to the Justice Department, the Bandidos brokered an agreement with the Texas Mexican Mafia to traffic cocaine and methamphetamine without paying the typical 10 percent permission fee. "I'm not convinced every Bandidos member commits crimes," Fuchs told me. "But the way this organization operated had criminal activities intertwined throughout."

In other states, Bandidos shared territory with other One Percenter outlaw clubs — but Texas, their motherland, they had always claimed for themselves. "Every Bandido in the U.S. has a Texas flag on their vest," Fuchs says. According to Reavis, Bandidos ignored citizen bikers wearing American Motorcycle Association patches, but when it came to other outlaw clubs in Texas, "if you don't behave like the subject of their feudal power, you're going to be in trouble." As he noted in his article, this hegemony extended to

both nomenclature — a Black club called the African Bandits changed its name to the Mandinkas to avoid a war — and attire. “On the list of prohibited adornments” sewn on other clubs’ jackets, Reavis wrote, “are rocker patches that say Texas — for Bandidos consider that their native, exclusive turf.”

The Cossacks, founded in 1969, were nearly as old as the Bandidos. The club spent most of its existence with a much lower profile, but by 2015, its membership, and its ambitions, had grown. Sometime the year before, the Cossacks began wearing a Texas rocker on the back of their own vests. Federal investigators have claimed the Cossacks asked the Bandidos for permission first; according to W., the Cossacks simply went to the Bandidos and “told them we were doing it.” But in both accounts, the Cossacks were given a green light. “Actually,” W. told me, “their exact words, because I was sitting at the table that day, were, ‘If anybody deserves to have a Texas rocker, it would be the Cossacks, because you’ve been around just as long, and you’ve earned it.’”

At some point in fall 2014, though, Pike, the Bandidos’ president, convened a meeting at his home in Conroe, Texas. His second in command, John Portillo, and the national sergeant-at-arms, Justin Forster, attended. It’s unclear what had soured the relationship with the Cossacks — some believe it came down to the fact that the Cossacks made their Texas rocker substantially larger than the Bandidos’ — but permission to wear the patch was rescinded. And when the Cossacks refused to remove it, Fuchs says, “war was declared.”

The investigation that would lead to the takedown of the Bandidos’ national leadership came to be known as Operation Texas Rocker.

In 2015, the district attorney of McLennan County, where Waco is the largest city and county seat, was an ambitious 43-year-old named Abel Reyna. His father, Felipe, the son of an undocumented Mexican immigrant, put himself through law school while working as a janitor at the McLennan County courthouse; he, too, served as the county’s D.A., from 1977 to 1982. Abel initially worked as a criminal defense lawyer and attributed his success in part to ignorance: Unaware of how to work the system to avoid trials, he logged plenty of courtroom hours, developing a flair for persuading jurors. An early profile by Tommy Witherspoon of The Waco Tribune-Herald noted that, during jury selection, Reyna would dazzle the room by quickly memorizing dozens of potential jurors and calling on them by name.

Even though he worked as a defense lawyer, Reyna found himself disgusted by the number of cases the D.A., a five-term Democratic incumbent named John Segrest, was declining to prosecute. Reyna contested the seat in 2010, running as a law-and-order Republican and promising less lenient plea deals. “Law enforcement is voting for me,” he said during the campaign; stocky and buzz-cut, he *looked* more like a cop than a lawyer. He managed an upset victory, and by 2015, he had been easily re-elected to a second term. Despite a prickly relationship with the press and critiques that he wasn’t spending as much time personally trying cases as he had promised, Reyna had fulfilled his central campaign pledge, perhaps to a fault — his office was prosecuting cases to such an aggressive degree that concerns rose about jail overcrowding.

The weekend of the brawl, Waco’s police chief, Brent Stroman, was visiting family in Boston. The acting chief was Robert Lanning, a Waco native whose father founded the local Dr Pepper Museum. He heard about the shooting around 1:30 p.m., after church, and headed to Twin Peaks.

To that point, the police had been proceeding with a capital murder investigation. The bikers weren’t being given Miranda warnings because they were being treated as witnesses. According to Matthew Clendennen, a member of a Cossacks support club called the Scimitars, the bikers had been told that they would be transported to a facility where officers could take statements, and then they would be free to go. “The police were doing this correctly at first,” says Looney, the defense attorney. Between witness testimony and video and forensic evidence, cases might have been built against specific men responsible for the violence.

Lanning later said that he found Reyna and his first assistant D.A., Michael Jarrett, walking around the crime scene. Reyna, he said, initially told him that “he felt all of the bikers wearing colors should be

charged,” then later narrowed that to Bandidos, Cossacks and their affiliates. (Reyna has disputed the first part of that account.) Lanning didn’t think that would be appropriate, and neither did two other assistant chiefs and a sergeant he consulted. He called Stroman, the chief, in Boston and told him, as Stroman would later recall, something “to the effect that he” — Reyna — “was wanting everyone arrested.” Stroman said it was Lanning’s call. “But I told him I was not going to make that decision,” Lanning said. “Or, if I did make that decision, it would be not to arrest.”

So Stroman called Reyna, who assured him there was probable cause for a mass arrest and that “he could stand in front of a jury and prosecute everyone that we arrested.” (Reyna disputes this portion of Stroman’s account.) Stroman told Lanning to make the arrests.

The bikers were transferred to the Waco Convention Center, where police officers separated them based on the colors on their vests, placing them in different rooms with their hands zip-tied behind their backs. Many ended up spending the night there, sleeping on the floor while restrained. Cody Ledbetter, a Cossack who grew up in Waco, remembered the convention center as the site of car shows and tattoo expos. He wasn’t taken to Highway 6, the county jail, for booking until 10 the next morning, and wasn’t placed in a cell at Jack Harwell, an ICE detention facility, until 2 the following morning.

Lanning was still prepared to conduct a capital murder investigation. But at the convention center, he was informed by a member of the district attorney’s staff that a more appropriate charge would be “engaging in organized criminal activity,” defined by a Texas statute used to prosecute criminal gangs — in this case, by linking all the bikers to a conspiracy “with the intent to commit murder, capital murder or aggravated assault.” The staff was already writing up a boilerplate arrest affidavit, which would be signed by the lead detective working that day, Manuel Chavez. First it described the clash and the nine deaths. “After the altercation,” the somewhat tangled next paragraph began, “the subject was apprehended at the scene, while wearing common identifying distinctive signs or symbols or had an identifiable leadership or continuously or regularly associate in the commission of criminal activities.” An identical affidavit was used for each biker, their names handwritten by police officers on a blank line at the top. If found guilty, each faced a sentence ranging from 15 years to life.

By the time Looney took on William and Morgan English as clients, the couple had been sitting in jail for more than a week. His first order of business was a reduction of their million-dollar bonds. He couldn’t get anyone from the county to return his calls, so he drove to Waco and parked himself in the lobby of the D.A.’s office, telling Avery he didn’t plan on leaving “until somebody deals with me or arrests me.” Shortly before closing time, he was granted an audience. “And within five minutes,” according to Looney, “we had an agreement for a \$25,000 bond.”

Up in Dallas, Clint Broden, a lawyer who specialized in federal white-collar cases, received a call from his then wife’s aunt, who knew one of the arrested bikers — Clendennen, from the Scimitars, a 30-year-old with a wife, four children and his own landscaping business. The local defense bar was overwhelmed with cases, so Broden met Clendennen at the Waco detention center. He was, in Broden’s view, a weekend-warrior type who just liked to ride, drink and hang out. He said he researched the Scimitars before joining, wary of being in a club with a bad reputation. He had no criminal record and was carrying only a two-inch pocketknife at Twin Peaks. He was on the patio drinking a glass of water when the shots rang out, after which his actions, Broden later wrote in a case filing, “were consistent with what 99 percent of the population would do — he immediately took cover to avoid being struck.”

After being transferred to the convention center, where he thought he would simply be giving a witness statement, Clendennen wound up spending more than two weeks in jail, unable to afford the \$100,000 required for his \$1 million bond. Broden talked to the D.A.’s office about reducing that amount, but nobody seemed in any rush to get anything done, even with so many people sitting in jail. Eventually he filed a lawsuit on Clendennen’s behalf, naming the city, county and Officer Chavez as defendants. He received a call from the office the next day, saying they would reduce the bond to \$100,000.

Looney found the identical bonds and probable-cause affidavits farcical on their face. “Justice is individualized,” he told me. “There’s no class-action prosecution.” Back in Houston, he made it his

mission to replace court-appointed defense attorneys before they could push their clients into accepting plea deals — an outcome he was convinced had been part of the D.A.'s strategy all along. With Avery's help, Looney would eventually persuade nearly 30 lawyers to take pro bono Twin Peaks cases. "When I called, some were like, 'I don't know if I have the time,'" Avery told me. "I'd say: 'You don't need the time. You have me!'"

Still, the local justice system did not seem like friendly turf for the bikers. W.H. Peterson, the justice of the peace who set the identical million-dollar bonds, told The Waco Tribune-Herald that "I think it is important to send a message. We had nine people killed in our community." After speaking to the press, Broden and Clendennen were hit with a gag order issued by the district judge Matt Johnson, Reyna's former law partner. A Waco police detective was named the foreman of a grand jury that could hear Twin Peaks cases. By July 10, all but four of the bikers had been freed on bond, but judges still ruled against defense lawyers, including Looney, who argued that there hadn't been cause to arrest their clients in the first place.

More stories began to trickle out, like that of Patrick Harris. He was a graduate student in Austin who worked as a volunteer clown with Hunter Adams, the real-life Patch Adams. Several members of his family worked in law enforcement in Houston, where his uncle, Raul Martinez, was the first Hispanic person to join the Police Department. Harris had no criminal record and no connection to the Cossacks or the Bandidos; his club, the Grim Guardians, worked as advocates for victims of child abuse. He had been outside parking his motorcycle when the shooting started, but he still found himself swept up in the mass arrest, along with two other friends from his club. "One is a civil engineer for the city" of Austin, Harris told me, "and the other is the foreman for a nonprofit that makes tiny homes for homeless people." How many other bikers rounded up at the scene, citizens following the case might reasonably wonder, had been ordinary motorcycle enthusiasts with no connection to violent crime?

Jake Carrizal, of the Dallas chapter of the Bandidos, was the first biker to stand trial. Jury selection began in fall 2017, two and a half years after Twin Peaks. Johnson, the district judge, presided.

Carrizal probably struck the prosecutors as both a high-value target and an easy win. Since his arrest, he had risen from vice president to president of his chapter, and he had flagrantly violated the conditions of his bond by continuing to associate with club members. Carrizal also admitted to firing his pistol at someone and lying to the police by denying he had brought a gun.

The prosecutors showed jurors stickers and patches on Bandidos' gear, including one on Carrizal's father's bike that said "I Do Gang Things." ("Is that a literal patch," Jarrett asked sarcastically, "or is that a secret meaning that means the exact opposite of what it says?") The prosecutors also revealed damaging text messages, including an exchange between Carrizal and a support-club member called Jughead, who had texted to say that Cossacks had tagged the wall of a bar in Dallas and might still be nearby. "OK," Carrizal replied. "I'm not far away if you need me and I'm packing." What was he packing, Jarrett asked — a lunch?

In the end, though, Carrizal, in his thick black glasses, soft-spoken and obviously intelligent, made a surprisingly compelling witness, undermining the state's portrayal of him as a violent gang leader. He claimed the Cossacks had ambushed his crew, and he began crying when talking about his father, Chris Carrizal, who was known as Shovel, being shot that day. Before Twin Peaks, he had never been arrested. A Cossack, he said, threw the first punch, and Carrizal got in a single punch before being swarmed: "I remember they had brass knuckles, and they were trying to get inside my face shield — they were trying to hit inside there. I was just kicking and punching. I remember I had a foldout pocketknife in my pocket. And I was trying to get that pocketknife because I wanted to get them off me, and I never could." Tommy Witherspoon, who covered the trial for The Waco Tribune-Herald, told me that Carrizal was "the most effective defendant I've ever seen take the stand in his own defense, and I've been doing this for 40 years."

On Nov. 10, 2017, after deliberating for 14 hours, the Carrizal jury announced that it could not reach a verdict, and the judge declared a mistrial.

This was far from the prosecutors' only setback. Because Reyna was named in a number of the civil suits, two defense lawyers — Broden and Abigail Anastasio, a friend Looney recruited from Houston — argued that the district attorney had a financial incentive to bring the cases to trial, and they began filing motions to disqualify him from pending matters involving their clients. They also accused him of improperly hijacking the police investigation in, as Broden wrote, “an act of political opportunism.”

At an August 2016 motion hearing, a combative Reyna took the stand to insist that he wasn't worried about lawsuits. There had been a “huge gaping hole in information” between officials at the crime scene and those at the convention center, Reyna said, something he tried to rectify. He said he told Officer Chavez, who signed the arrest affidavit, “Manny, you need to read every single line and word in this affidavit, and if you cannot swear to it, then you need to go back out there and get on the phone.” But Chavez testified he didn't speak with Reyna that night, and Chief Stroman acknowledged that he could not recall having ever seen Reyna at a crime scene before. Law enforcement, Broden argued in a court filing, had ignored evidence that didn't support their narrative, including video that showed most of the bikers “running away from the disturbance, not toward it.”

The judge ultimately allowed Reyna to remain in charge. But on the same day that Carrizal's jury announced it could not reach a verdict, Broden filed a new motion to disqualify, this time making an even more explosive contention: Reyna, the motion claimed, was the subject of an F.B.I. investigation. For months, Broden had been hearing rumors that a former assistant D.A. in Reyna's office, Greg Davis, had left the job in protest. He would later say, in a sworn affidavit, that he had gone to the feds, claiming that Reyna had engaged in a pattern of preferential treatment for friends, campaign supporters and their relatives, including declining to prosecute D.W.I. and marijuana-possession cases. When Davis and Jarrett told Reyna his actions were inappropriate, Reyna “said words to the effect of ‘Never get in my [expletive] business again,’” Davis said in the affidavit, which Broden filed with his motion. Davis also said that he, Jarrett and others had been in contact with an F.B.I. agent regarding a public-corruption investigation of Reyna.

Five days later, Reyna filed re-election papers. But he was running for a third term in a radically different climate. The price tag for the Twin Peaks prosecutions was already approaching \$1 million. In December 2017, two more affidavits were filed with Broden's motion to disqualify. In the first, a former county prosecutor, Brittany Scaramucci, claimed that a client she represented as a defense attorney had told F.B.I. investigators he personally delivered cocaine to Reyna. In the second, a retired Waco police detective, Sherry Kingrey, said she had told the F.B.I. about an illegal gambling ring she believed Reyna and his friends had been operating.

Reyna also had an opponent in the Republican primary: Barry Johnson, a 61-year-old personal-injury attorney who had only ever tried a single felony case before and who had been living in Dallas since 1989, returning to Waco, his hometown, only earlier in 2017 to care for his ailing mother. At a candidate forum in January, Reyna dismissed the allegations in the affidavits as “fake news.”

Mass arrests of supposed gang members are not unique to bikers. In April 2016, not quite a year after Twin Peaks, nearly 700 law-enforcement officers made [a predawn raid in and around a Bronx housing project called Eastchester Gardens](#). It was the largest gang takedown in New York City history, boasted Preet Bharara, at the time the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York.

But [a 2019 report on the mass prosecution of the so-called Bronx 120](#) — written by Babe Howell, a professor at the CUNY School of Law, and Priscilla Bustamante, a Ph.D. candidate at CUNY — would undercut this claim. Fifty-one of the defendants, they noted, were not even accused of being gang members by the state; only one-third of those arrested were charged with a violent or firearm-related offense; of the 117 people ultimately convicted of a crime, 35 were convicted based on nothing more serious than selling marijuana. “Conspiracy has famously been dubbed ‘the darling of the modern prosecutor’s nursery,’” the authors wrote — its use tolerated “despite warnings relating to the potential for abuse and unfairness.” Conspiracy charges, they pointed out, did not require proof that someone was involved in committing a target crime or even knew about it. All the prosecution needed to prove was an

agreement, even an inferred one, to commit a target crime, and that “some party to the agreement committed an overt act in furtherance of the agreement.”

Given that, Reyna’s decision to pursue a criminal-conspiracy case against two of the most infamous biker gangs in the state has a certain logic. It also raises an obvious thought experiment: Would gangs with different demographic make-ups have been easier to convict? The coding of the biker as a freedom-loving rebel — as American as the Harley he rides, as mythic as the cowboy — may have lessened the effectiveness of a prosecutorial tool built in part on its own myths about public threats.

Pursuing individual murder charges would have had its own limitations. Despite the fact that the shootings took place outside a crowded restaurant, with numerous witnesses and video evidence, the chaotic nature of the brawl made singling out bad actors difficult. As Don Tittle, a Dallas lawyer who specializes in civil rights and police-misconduct cases, and who is handling a number of the bikers’ civil lawsuits, pointed out to me, “The obvious conundrum for the prosecution was that any bikers who fired shots could claim self-defense.” (Texas has a “stand your ground” law.) And while the police made a show of the 151 guns recovered at the scene, bringing a firearm to Sunday brunch isn’t necessarily evidence of much in a permissive open-carry state. “The media and law enforcement made a big deal about all these weapons,” Avery says. “Well, go to another restaurant in Waco that doesn’t have bikers and ask everybody to throw their weapons on the ground and see how many you get. You’re in Texas!”

Reyna’s charging decisions would come to be seen as self-evidently disastrous — including for him personally, once he faced his own legal problems. Another hearing on the motion to disqualify him was scheduled for February 2018. Nearly three years after Twin Peaks, the local courthouses no longer seemed so congenial. District Judge Ralph Strother indicated that he would require Reyna to testify at the new hearing. “And Clint was going to be able to ask him, ‘Is it true that you bought cocaine?’” Tittle says. As soon as Reyna faced accusations of corruption and drug use, Looney says, “it was in the nature of a chicken who’s had its neck wrung. Its legs are still running, but it’s going to fall down.”

On the day of the hearing, Reyna announced that he would be dismissing the cases of a handful of bikers, rendering the motion to disqualify — and his required testimony — moot. Broden and Tittle talked afterward and decided to file motions to disqualify Reyna from the cases of another set of bikers. The same thing happened again: Reyna dismissed the cases. A few weeks before the primary, The Waco Tribune-Herald published an editorial that began, “With McLennan County District Attorney Abel Reyna desperately dumping Twin Peaks biker cases right and left in recent days, the astonished taxpayer must demand honesty of himself if not of Reyna: Does anyone really believe Reyna has suddenly been struck by an epiphany that has stubbornly eluded him in the nearly three years since the May 17, 2015, biker shootout that left nine dead and 20 wounded?”

Citing pending civil lawsuits, Reyna declined to speak on the record for this article, but he vigorously denied all the charges made in the affidavits secured by Broden, and he disputed The Tribune-Herald’s characterization of his actions. In the end, his primary wasn’t even close: Johnson defeated him by nearly 20 points. Before his term ended, Reyna would dismiss all but 24 of the bikers’ cases, with Johnson dismissing the final two dozen in April 2019. Carrizal was the only biker to go to trial. Over 130 civil rights lawsuits are still pending against Reyna, the city and county and law-enforcement officers involved in the arrests. But years after a fight that left people dead, wounded, paralyzed and fleeing in terror, nobody at all has been convicted of any crime.

Almost a year after the last wave of dismissals, I met Jerry Pierson, whose case was among them, at a back-alley dive bar in Dallas. Pierson, whose road name is Scratch, had a large 1 percent tattoo on his neck, smoked Marlboros and was missing a few lower teeth. After joking about how the bartender would charge me double because she was a blonde, prompting her to roll her eyes, Pierson explained, “That’s my old lady.” (Later, he would clarify that she was not “technically” his old lady.)

Pierson, 55, was one of the Bandidos who rode to Waco with Carrizal. When the fight broke out, a Cossack beat him with a telescoping baton, leading to a dozen staples in his head. More recently, he had been forced to step away from the club temporarily, a condition of the two-year probation he received for a

misdeemeanor conviction unrelated to Twin Peaks. (He insists upon his innocence.) When a distant police siren sounded outside, Pierson smiled and said: “Bandido Uber. My ride’s here.”

Pierson started riding motorcycles at 15, when he got a hardship license so he could help support his mother by working at a Sonic Drive-In. He remains loyal to his club and won’t speak about any internal business, except to insist that the Bandidos are not drug dealers or organized criminals — back in the early days, maybe things were different, but now? “I go to work every day at 5 a.m.,” he said, adding: “I mean, I’m more boring than you. They don’t want to hear that. Nobody wants to hear that.” Pierson works as a diesel-engine technician, though he said the Twin Peaks arrest and subsequent legal bills forced him to sideline the business he started and take another job for less pay. I heard similar stories from many bikers: W. said his arrest had cost him his job, and Ledbetter lost his job as a diesel mechanic. (He has also been diagnosed with PTSD after witnessing the death of his stepfather, Danny Boyett, at Twin Peaks.) Harris, the Grim Guardian who volunteered with the real-life Patch Adams, was meant to fly to Mexico City for a clowning trip, but when he arrived in Guadalajara for his connecting flight, he was sent back to the United States because, he was told, his name had been placed in a Texas gang database.

Still, law-enforcement officials push back on the notion of the Bandidos, in particular, as wronged innocents. The federal investigation known as Operation Texas Rocker — already underway when Twin Peaks happened — would ultimately focus on the president and vice president of the Bandidos, Pike and Portillo. They were arrested in January 2016 and found guilty, after a three-month trial in 2018, of “conspiring to conduct the affairs of a criminal organization through racketeering acts including directing, sanctioning, approving and permitting members of the Bandidos to commit murder, attempted murder, robbery, assault, intimidation, extortion and drug trafficking,” per the Justice Department. Each received at least one life sentence. Pike and Portillo had ordered the murder of Anthony Benesh, an Austin biker who had been trying to start a Texas chapter of the Hells Angels. According to Eric Fuchs, the assistant U.S. attorney who led the prosecution, a Bandidos hit team followed Benesh, his girlfriend and his two sons to a pizzeria. When the family exited the restaurant, one of the Bandidos, parked in a vehicle about 30 yards away, “fired a single shot from a hunting rifle that split his head open like a watermelon,” Fuchs told me. The prosecutors also provided evidence that Portillo had declared the Bandidos at “all-out war” with the Cossacks.

Fuchs declined to comment on the Waco cases, but he said testimony during his prosecution showed that once Bandidos prospects reach a certain point, “someone has a conversation with you, letting you know what this is.” Steve Cook, a police gang-unit veteran from Kansas City who runs outlaw-motorcycle-culture training seminars, told me: “You don’t see the Kiwanis and the Lions Club running up on each other at Twin Peaks and getting into a gun battle, because guess what? They’re legitimate fraternal organizations that aren’t running a criminal enterprise.”

Jay Dobyns, a former undercover agent with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives who infiltrated the Hells Angels in the early aughts, said he understood the attractiveness of the outlaw clubs for a certain type of “9-to-5, blue-collar guy” — suddenly “he’s respected, admired, feared, people want to shake his hand, buy him drinks, give him drugs, girls who in any other situation wouldn’t look twice at this guy are cozying up to him.” But he also said the fight between the Cossacks and the Bandidos was ultimately “not any different than Crips and Bloods trying to own a particular street corner to sell drugs on,” and that insisting otherwise was “naïve.”

Reavis — whose Texas Monthly editor let him expense a shotgun he carried while reporting his Bandidos article — nonetheless believes the Mafia comparisons are overblown. He draws a distinction between organized crime and “a motorcycle club that includes lots of criminals.” Operating like the Mafia “would curb their behavior,” he says. “It would impose a great deal of discipline on them. I don’t think the Mafia got on motorcycles drunk and rode 100 miles an hour.” He didn’t buy the “Robin Hood myths” the clubs created around things like charity rides, but neither did he buy “the other myth” about criminal conspiracy. “The police are dragon killers,” he says, “so they’re going to make the dragon look as bad as they can.” Even among the dragons, though, Twin Peaks has left a nagging sense of justice undone.

	<p>Manuel Rodriguez, a Bandido killed in the fight, was standing beside Pierson when the violence broke out. Rodriguez was 40; his friends say his road name, Candyman, came from his love of candy, which he insisted prospects keep on hand. When the D.A. dropped the last cases, Pierson recalled: "I talked to Roxanne and said, 'So that's it.' And she's all excited because they fought for our rights. And I'm going, yes, I'm happy, but Candyman died beside me, and — no, it's not OK with me. It's still not, to this day. I don't want to say anything that I shouldn't. I'm not in the club, and I'm always going to belong to the Bandidos. But it's a bothersome thing. You reindict me, I'll take my roll in court. But goddamn, figure out who done this and get <i>somebody</i> in trouble."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 CBP seizes \$2.9M meth hidden in onions
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/meth-onions-seized-california-border/
GIST	<p>Authorities have seized approximately 1,336 pounds of methamphetamine disguised as onions in Southern California, U.S. Customs and Border Protection said Friday. The confiscated drugs are worth an estimated \$2.9 million, authorities said.</p> <p>"This was not only a clever attempt to try and smuggle in narcotics, one I haven't seen before, but also time consuming to wrap narcotics into these small packages, designed to look like onions," Sidney Aki, director of field operations in San Diego, said in a statement.</p> <p>On February 20, border patrol officers inspected a tractor trailer carrying a shipment indicated as onions. An officer referred the 46-year-old driver and the items for a "more intense examination," where a canine team screened the tractor trailer. A dog alerted to the shipment, which prompted officers to search it further.</p> <p>That's when authorities discovered almost 1,200 packages of methamphetamine shaped in "small globes with a white covering" that were mixed with actual sacks of onions, CBP said.</p> <p>"While we have certainly seen narcotics in produce before, it's unusual for us to see this level of detail in the concealment," Aki said.</p> <p>The driver, who is a Mexican citizen, was arrested for the alleged drug smuggling attempt and turned over to federal agencies for additional disposition.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/26 Covid cases rise slightly WA prison
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/covid-cases-rise-slightly-at-wa-prison/
GIST	<p>The number of active COVID-19 cases among incarcerated individuals at Larch Corrections Center rose slightly Friday, according to an end-of-the-week bulletin from the Washington Department of Corrections.</p> <p>The DOC reported 87 active cases among incarcerated individuals, up eight cases from Wednesday but still a slight drop from last week. There are four active cases among staff.</p> <p>The minimum-security prison near Yacolt, Clark County, was placed on facilitywide outbreak status Feb. 7 after four inmates in the living unit tested positive.</p> <p>To date, 410 incarcerated individuals and 68 staff members have tested positive, according to the DOC. The majority of those cases came during an outbreak in late 2020, with more than 90% of the inmate population testing positive.</p> <p>In December, the most recent data available, Larch's average daily population was 222, with a capacity of 240.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 Portland shooting fear: vigilante violence
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/27/portland-shooting-extremism-america-predictable
GIST	<p>The shooting of a respected volunteer during a racial justice protest in Portland, Oregon last weekend has roiled the activist community in the city, and raised fresh fears about “vigilante violence” and escalating extremism in America.</p> <p>Authorities on Tuesday filed murder charges against 43-year-old Benjamin Smith, who police say showed up to a protest against police violence on Saturday night, yelled at demonstrators to leave, and then shot at the group. He killed 60-year-old June Knightly and wounded four others, police say.</p> <p>Knightly, a longtime activist involved in racial justice protests and LGBTQ+ organizing, was known as a “peacemaker” who strived to keep people safe during protests. The night of her death she had been working as a traffic safety volunteer at a demonstration calling for justice for Amir Locke and Daunte Wright, two Black men killed by police in Minnesota.</p> <p>Knightly’s friends and local advocates said the violence was predictable in Portland, which has seen far-right gatherings and chaotic and sometimes violent protests in the last year. The region also has a dark history of white supremacy and racist hate crimes despite its liberal reputation. The violence against protesters also comes three months after the acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse, who was treated as a hero among extremist Republicans and far-right groups after he killed two men at an anti-racism demonstration in Wisconsin. Advocates warn of a growing threat that extremists – emboldened by Rittenhouse’s court victory, radicalized online, and encouraged by some Republicans – will commit more acts of violence.</p> <p>‘Radicalized and angry’</p> <p>Smith “confronted” protesters at Portland’s Normandale Park at about 8 pm local time on Saturday, prosecutors say, “yelling at them and demanding they leave the area”. The activists told Smith to leave them alone. Instead, Smith demanded they “‘make’ him leave,” and “aggressively” approached one of them, who pushed Smith back. Moments later, he began shooting, according to court records.</p> <p>Knightly and four other people were hit. Knightly and three other women who were wounded were not directly part of the march, one surviving victim told the New York Times, but were helping reroute traffic. None of them were armed, she said, adding that the gunman called them “terrorists” and slurs before shooting.</p> <p>The shooting ended when someone shot Smith, officials said. That individual was initially arrested, but is not facing charges and was not named in the charging documents. One surviving victim was struck in the neck and is paralyzed, another was struck in the abdomen, and two others were treated at a hospital and discharged. Smith was hit in the hip and hospitalized.</p> <p>Kristine Christenson, Smith’s roommate, said that she and others in their apartment complex were “heartbroken,” but weren’t surprised to learn of the shooting. “[Smith’s] been talking about wanting to do something like this for a while,” she said. “As far as I’m concerned, the person who fired back on Smith saved my life.”</p> <p>Christenson said she had lived with Smith for seven years, but had felt increasingly threatened in recent years. “He made me extremely uncomfortable and unsafe in my own living space.”</p> <p>“[Smith] got angrier and more and more rightwing over the past few years,” she said in an email, adding that it appeared he had become “radicalized” and was slipping “further and further down this alt right rabbit hole”.</p> <p>Christenson said she tried to keep her distance, but that she overheard him listening to rightwing content, including from far-right conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. She said Smith wore a “Kyle Rittenhouse true patriot” shirt and often talked angrily about leftwing protesters, Black Lives Matter and “antifa”, unhoused people living on the streets and Covid restrictions.</p>

‘They blamed the victims’

The shooting sent shock waves through a city that has seen frequent protests since the George Floyd uprisings of 2020, and occasional clashes between anti-fascist activists and far-right protesters.

But advocates say the response from law enforcement leaders to the shooting only exacerbated concerns. The initial [statement](#) from the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) said the shooting had stated “with a confrontation between an armed homeowner and armed protesters”.

Smith was not a homeowner and had gone to the demonstration, which was down the street from his apartment. But the narrative [quickly spread in national media](#).

Portland police spokesperson Kevin Allen did not say why the original press release referred to a “homeowner”, but he said in an email that an investigation determined that was inaccurate: “The use of the term was never intended to mislead anyone.”

He said there was “tremendous amount of pressure” to release information in real time and that the department strives to “always remember the victims and their loved ones” in communications.

The city later updated its statement to call Smith “an armed area resident”, but to advocates the mistake was part of a pattern of city leaders and law enforcement officials misrepresenting racial justice protesters and failing to address the threats of the the far-right, advocates said.

PPB critics point to a list of recent scandals: at one 2017 protest in Portland, federal officers allowed a member of a rightwing “patriot” militia-style group to help [arrest an anti-fascist activist](#); in 2019, a lieutenant was caught [exchanging friendly](#) text messages with a rightwing leader, and later [cleared](#) of wrongdoing; in 2020, the department allegedly [deployed teargas](#) against racial justice demonstrators 300 times on 20 different days; in 2021, police [leaked](#) a false story claiming that the first Black woman to serve as a Portland city commissioner, who has been critical of the department, was a hit-and-run suspect; and earlier this year, it was revealed that Portland police [training documents](#) included a meme that mocked protesters as “dirty hippies” and celebrated using violence against them.

“This is a pattern and practice of Portland police,” said Sandy Chung, executive director of the ACLU of Oregon. “This seems to be an effort by Portland police to frame the story as ‘just a confrontation’, and that somehow the people involved in providing traffic safety for the march were also culpable, when there is no evidence of that.”

“This is blaming victims for the harms committed against them,” said Bobbin Singh, executive director of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, adding that the shooting was “completely predictable and inevitable”. He has since called on Portland’s mayor, Ted Wheeler, to [resign](#) and for the leadership of PPB to be dismantled.

Wheeler in particular is facing intense scrutiny over comments he made in 2021 after a [year](#) of sustained protests, saying he wanted to “unmask” protesters committing vandalism and arson, and that it was time to “hurt them a little bit”.

“Mayor Wheeler, the top level manager of the Portland police bureau, has not set up the systems and policies and culture where there is accountability,” Chung said, “and it means that our communities are less safe.”

Teressa Raiford, executive director of Don’t Shoot Portland, a social justice group, said the rhetoric against protesters was creating an environment that enabled violence and was meant to discourage people from marching against police brutality.

“It’s always denouncements of vandalism rather than denouncements of violence against people, and that hinders the progress we need to make as a society,” she said of officials’ rhetoric. After the killing, her group canceled an art gallery show and paused outreach and mutual aid efforts, such as food distribution,

due to safety concerns. “We want to just keep doing the work as usual, but we need time to mourn ... and we’re scared. We know that there are valid threats.”

The mayor’s spokesperson referred the Guardian to Wheeler’s press conference on Tuesday, during which he was asked whether he regretted his past comments about making protesters “hurt”. He [responded](#) that he was “not referring to or advocating violence”, adding, “If I regret anything it’s that I used a statement that could be used out of context for political gain.”

“We know that there are tensions with some members of the community and some do not feel comfortable talking to us,” Allen, the police spokesperson, added. “We hope that through continued dialogue, we can show that we do our work and pursue investigations without regard to political affiliation or involvement in lawful free speech activity.”

It wasn’t clear if Smith had a lawyer, and he could not be reached for comment.

‘She was dedicated to service’

Despite police backlash and fears of extremist violence, Knightly was dedicated to supporting racial justice movements, her friends said.

“‘Service’ is the word I would use to describe her approach to the world,” said Kathleen Saadat, her longtime friend in Portland. “She was about taking care of people. She knew what it was like to not have a whole lot, so she had compassion for people.” Saadat, 81, said Knightly loved to cook – shepherd’s pie was her speciality – and leaves behind a wife and son.

Knightly, also [known](#) by the nickname T-Rex, would volunteer to help with transportation for people with disabilities during protests, Raiford said: “She was a peacemaker. She would help people pull together and work through the chaos. When you’re protesting, there’s a lot of trauma. She could see when people were hurting and help them.”

Chung recalled Knightly helping ensure high school students were safe as they protested campus police. Saadat said she and Knightly had long conversations about how to be most impactful with activism: “June was incredibly introspective. She didn’t just act, she thought about what she was doing.”

They didn’t talk much about the dangers of protesting, but Saadat said they had a conversation acknowledging that “if you decide to get out there, you accept the fact that you might be killed”, adding, “You don’t expect it, but you accept it.”

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HEADLINE	02/26 Las Vegas hookah parlor shooting; 14 shot
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/26/14-shot-at-vegas-hookah-parlor-1-dead-and-2-critic/
GIST	<p>LAS VEGAS (AP) — Fourteen people were shot before dawn Saturday morning at a hookah parlor and police said one man died and that two of those hit by gunfire suffered critical injuries.</p> <p>The shooting happened at about 3:15 a.m. and preliminary information indicated there was a party during which two people got into an altercation and exchanged gunfire, striking multiple people, said police Capt. Dori Koren.</p> <p>Koren told reporters no arrests have been made and no suspect descriptions were immediately available but that authorities did not believe there was any danger to the general public.</p> <p>Police went to the hookah bar identified by the Las Vegas Review-Journal as Manny’s Glow Ultra Lounge & Restaurant after receiving multiple 911 calls, Koren said.</p> <p>Officers secured the scene and rendered aid, including applying tourniquets and administering CPR, Koren said.</p>

	<p>Investigators were trying to determine the types of gun or guns used in the shooting.</p> <p>”It’s a fairly large scene so it’s going to take some time to go through the entire scene,” he said. “We’re not really sure exactly what kind of weapon was used, or exactly if there were two shooters. We believe there was an exchange of gunfire, but we’re still looking into all of that information.”</p> <p>The medical aid provided to victims by the officers who initially responded “definitely made a difference in this case,” Koren said.</p> <p>Hookahs are water pipes that are used to smoke specially made tobacco that comes in different flavors.</p> <p>Hours after the shooting, much of the shopping plaza where the shooting occurred remained cordoned off by police tape as officers looked for stray bullets and other evidence.</p> <p>“My thoughts are with the victim, their loved ones, and all those injured in last night’s senseless shooting at a hookah lounge,” U.S. Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev., said on Twitter. “We must do more to end gun violence.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/27 For police: see something, say something
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/27/us/police-intervention-minneapolis-george-floyd.html
GIST	<p>BALTIMORE — On an early Monday morning in a chilly classroom in Baltimore, a diverse group of recruits to one of the nation’s most troubled police departments gathered for a new kind of training. The screen flashed a photo of a man whose face is now familiar to the world.</p> <p>“What happened to George Floyd?” the instructor barked.</p> <p>“He was lynched,” one trainee responded. “He was murdered,” another said.</p> <p>“How many other officers were there?” the instructor asked.</p> <p>Many knew the answer: “Three.”</p> <p>That was the crux of the matter at hand — not the senior officer who knelt on Mr. Floyd’s neck, Derek Chauvin, but the three others who did not stop him.</p> <p>The question of what other officers could or should have done was not abstract: More than a thousand miles away those same three former officers, two of them rank rookies, were standing trial on charges that they failed to prevent the death of Mr. Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020. On Thursday, they were convicted and could face many years in prison.</p> <p>For decades, many police critics have complained that officers who allow police misconduct to happen do more damage to the community’s trust than the officers who commit it. Yet they have not been a focus — when Rodney King was Tased and beaten by four Los Angeles officers in 1991, more than a dozen others looked on. None of the onlookers faced charges.</p> <p>The federal trial of Tou Thao, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane in Minnesota this month was one of the rare attempts to hold officers to account over the issue. The duty to stop a fellow officer who is engaging in misconduct has long been embedded in many department policies and upheld by the courts, but the defendants in Minnesota argued that during their training it was “little more than a word on a PowerPoint.”</p> <p>Officers across the country have been told they must intervene, but they have not necessarily been taught how to do so.</p>

Mr. Floyd's death has begun to change that. More than 215 departments have signed up for a Georgetown University program that teaches officers the philosophy and techniques of intervention.

"Watching that Floyd video, you're thinking, the only thing that could have snapped any one of those officers out of it would have been for another one of them to intervene," said Chief Kelly McCarthy of Mendota Heights, a Minneapolis suburb, whose department has begun to use the training. Dallas, Seattle, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., and all of New Jersey are also participating.

Active bystander training is not new — the airline industry and hospitals have used it to empower co-pilots and nurses to speak up to prevent mistakes, and it has even been used to help stop sexual assault on college campuses.

Its use in policing began in New Orleans in 2016 after a number of officers faced criminal charges, including a rookie who went to prison for helping cover up a fatal beating perpetrated by his training officer.

But other departments had been slow to adopt such programs, for many reasons. The paramilitary structure of law enforcement agencies discourages questioning the chain of command, and departments have a long track record of retaliating against whistle-blowers. Officers who break the culture of silence risk being passed over for promotions or even being fired themselves, as Cariol Horne in Buffalo was after she stopped a white officer from choking a Black suspect.

To overcome these barriers, trainees are told that the program is not about ratting out their comrades but stopping them from committing misconduct in the first place. They are told to think of officers in need of intervention as humans who get tired and stressed and make mistakes, and of themselves as helpers who can respond to warning signs of mental illness, addiction or suicide.

Intervention, the premise goes, is just one more way that officers take care of one another.

"We get an opportunity to redefine this whole freaking thing about the 'thin blue line,' redefine what it means to have each other's back," said Jerry Clayton, the sheriff in Ann Arbor, Mich. "It's so hypocritical to criticize the community around 'no snitching'" — an unwritten rule on the street that officers say prevents them from solving crimes — "and then we turn around and say, 'I can't talk about that thing that happened.'"

Michael S. Harrison was the chief who started the training in New Orleans in 2015 with the help of Ervin Staub, a psychologist and Holocaust survivor who has studied the dynamics of bystander intervention.

Mr. Harrison brought the program with him to Baltimore, where he is now the commissioner. At both departments, he has been charged with correcting a pattern of constitutional violations under agreements with the Justice Department known as consent decrees.

"Historically, loyalty was looked at as, if I confide in you, you keep my secret," Commissioner Harrison said. "We started teaching: Loyalty should be displayed on the front end" to prevent potential injury, death, career ruin or worse.

The bottom line, he said: "Let's let me help you not make this mistake in the first place."

In the two years after New Orleans trained its officers, the number of canine bites, police shootings, vehicle chases and use-of-force complaints dropped. Because of other changes mandated by the consent decree, it is not clear how much of those declines are attributable to intervention training, but close observers like Jonathan Aronie, the federal monitor, say it helped change department culture.

In Baltimore this month, the trainees acted out scenarios that might call for intervention. In one, an officer begins an illegal search of a woman's car; in another, a supervisor pressures an officer to pretend he did not hear a suspect ask for a lawyer — a request that normally would put an end to an interrogation.

Recruits were introduced to the “inhibitors” that keep bystanders passive, including lack of empathy, fear of being ostracized and “pluralistic ignorance” — when people assume that what is happening must be OK because no one else is intervening.

They watched a body-worn camera video that captured the Baltimore bicycle squad dealing with a belligerent young man who has been detained. When one officer removes his sunglasses — a sign that he may be about to use force — another officer quickly steps in to take his place. In a snippet from a 2020 protest in Seattle after Mr. Floyd's death, an officer speedily removes his partner's knee from a detainee's neck.

Police chiefs say that sometimes all that is needed in a tense situation is a discreet signal, like pointing to the pin officers get when they complete the training. Or officers may “tap out” overwrought colleagues by placing a hand on their shoulder or saying something like, “The lieutenant wants to talk to you.”

In New Orleans, “I got this” became a catchphrase and the name of the training program, Ethical Policing Is Courageous, became a verb — as in, “I'm going to EPIC you.”

In one incident in New Orleans, a sheriff's deputy who punched a handcuffed suspect was told by a New Orleans officer, “We don't roll like that anymore,” said Deputy Superintendent Paul Noel, who helped develop the program there.

An intervention program created at Georgetown Law — a revamp of EPIC called ABLE, or Active Bystandership in Law Enforcement — teaches a series of escalating steps: First, question the officer's actions, then challenge the officer, then command the officer to stop or physically intervene. In the Floyd case, Mr. Lane twice questioned whether Mr. Floyd should be moved to a safer position but dropped the issue when he was rebuffed. He faced one less charge than his co-defendants.

In Cincinnati, Sheriff Charmaine McGuffey said she had given three commendations for successful interventions at the county jail since her department began the program last year. In one, she said, a veteran officer got involved in a heated verbal exchange with an inmate, followed him to his cell and grabbed him. Another officer with far less seniority stepped in.

“He broke the inmate away from the officer and dragged him away from the situation, and was able to say to the officer, ‘Hey, you've gone too far, man.’”

Advocates have long called for increased accountability and clear consequences for officers who commit misconduct. They have also been generally supportive of intervention training, which does not replace the disciplinary process should misconduct occur.

“If that's what it takes to get police to buy in, that ‘We'll save each other's necks,’ fine,” said Michelle Gross, who helps lead the Minneapolis group Communities United Against Police Brutality. “It's harm reduction for the community.”

Ms. Gross said her organization and others had tried in vain to get the Minneapolis Police Department to adopt an intervention program in the years before Mr. Floyd was killed. More than a year after his death, the department, facing a Justice Department investigation, entered the Georgetown program.

Ms. Gross was skeptical of the department's commitment. “You can't do this on a limited basis; this is a top-down culture change,” she said. “What it really comes down to is they don't want to actually change the culture. They like the culture the way it is.”

Garrett Parten, a spokesman for the department, said Minneapolis was now using two separate training programs on the duty to intervene and called it “critical in our work to care for our community.”

In New Orleans, when the idea of peer intervention training was first broached, “The most common thing was, everybody said, ‘We already do that,’” Superintendent Noel said. “What we know from the research is, people don’t.”

Selecting officers with “street credibility” to teach the program — including some who would themselves have benefited from intervention earlier in their careers — helped it win acceptance, he said.

But all it takes is one roll of the eyes from a sergeant to undermine a training. And cultural change can be rocky.

The Orlando Police Department was booted from the Georgetown program after a manager complained that trainers were not adhering to the curriculum and was removed from his position. Chief Orlando Rolón said the manager was moved because he reported the problems to Georgetown instead of having the courage to tell his colleagues.

In Baltimore, the trainees had questions about retaliation. Were they really not going to get in trouble, they wanted to know, if they stepped in? Could it keep them from getting promoted?

“I understand why we need it and how it could help us, especially working with those older officers,” said Charda Scofield, a Black 23-year-old recruit who faced opposition from family and friends when she donned a uniform. She said she would soon be out on the street with her colleagues. “It’s definitely good training — but I haven’t actually seen it being applied.”

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HEADLINE	02/25 Jury acquits ex-cop in movie theater killing
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/popcorn-fear-death-theater-killing-trial-jury-83111913
GIST	<p>A Florida jury on Friday acquitted a retired police SWAT commander of murder for fatally shooting a fellow moviegoer during an argument over cellphone use.</p> <p>Deliberations in the trial began Friday and the six-person jury returned its verdict late that night, news outlets reported.</p> <p>Retired Tampa police Capt. Curtis Reeves, now 79, had been charged with second-degree murder for killing Chad Oulson during an altercation at a suburban movie theater on Jan. 13, 2014.</p> <p>During closing arguments, defense attorney Richard Escobar said that Oulson, 43, made Reeves, then 71, reasonably believe his life was in danger by turning, yelling and reaching toward him. He said Reeves made the decision to shoot based on his nearly 30 years in law enforcement and hours of training on the justifiable use of deadly force. Reeves didn’t have to wait until he was hit before defending himself, Escobar said.</p> <p>Reeves “had more knowledge, more experience, more study in that area than anyone in this courtroom,” Escobar said. “It’s a dangerous world.”</p> <p>But prosecutor Scott Rosenwasser countered that Reeves killed Oulson because he threw popcorn in his face, angering him because it violated his self-image as an “alpha male.”</p> <p>“He didn’t fear anything,” Rosenwasser said.</p> <p>No one disputes most of the basic facts. Reeves and Oulson did not know each other. They had gone with their wives to see a matinee showing of the Afghan War movie “Lone Survivor,” the Reeveses taking seats in the back row, the Oulsons one row in front of them, slightly to the right.</p>

As the previews began and despite an announcement to turn off cellphones, Oulson continued texting his 22-month-old daughter's day care. Reeves leaned over and told him to stop — Reeves says politely, Oulson's widow and others say it sounded like an order. After Oulson bluntly refused, perhaps with profanity, Reeves went to complain to the manager. When Reeves returned, seeing that Oulson had put his phone away, he told Oulson that if he wouldn't have told the manager if he known he would comply.

What happened over the next few seconds is where the stories diverge until Oulson grabbed Reeves' popcorn and flicked it back into Reeves' face. Reeves pulled his .380 handgun, lunged forward and fired one shot, killing Oulson and nearly severing the finger of Oulson's wife, Nicole, who had reached out to pull her husband back to his seat.

Escobar said the evidence proves their contention that during the disputed seconds, Oulson, before being shot, threw his cellphone at Reeves, striking him in the face, and then appeared ready to climb over the seats and attack, reaching toward him.

Reeves testified Thursday that in his entire law enforcement career he had never encountered someone so out of control and he feared he was about to be killed. Given his age, arthritis and other physical ailments, Reeves contended he could not have defended himself except by shooting.

Escobar said that it took less than three-quarters of a second between the popcorn toss and the shot. That is too fast for it to be the reason Reeves fired, he said.

“Impossible,” Escobar said.

But Rosenwasser contended Reeves' story was a lie. Security video does not show Oulson throwing his cellphone, the prosecutor said, and Reeves had no injury on his face where he says it hit him. But the video does show Oulson grabbing Reeves' popcorn bag, tossing it at him and Reeves firing. Witnesses testified they heard Reeves then mutter, “throw popcorn at me.”

He said Reeves' story about fearing for his life, that he was a physical “fragile egg” despite having just come back from a hunting trip and Oulson being out of control are all fabrications. They are aimed, Rosenwasser said, at covering up the fact that Reeves has an “alpha male mindset” who liked the adrenaline rush of being a police officer and SWAT commander. He killed Oulson in anger after he had his ego hurt by being challenged and having popcorn thrown in his face, Rosenwasser said.

He said Reeves never fired his gun as he moved through the robbery/homicide bureau, fugitive apprehension and SWAT, yet somehow this movie theater argument over a cellphone escalated to the point Reeves faced the most out-of-control, scariest person he ever faced and had to shoot.

“In his entire career that is the most he has ever been scared? Absolutely unreal,” Rosenwasser said.

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HEADLINE	02/26 El Salvador ex-president charged; massacre
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/26/el-salvadors-former-president-charged-over-1989-massacre-of-six-jesuit-priests
GIST	<p>Prosecutors in El Salvador have charged the former president Alfredo Cristiani over the 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests that sparked international outrage.</p> <p>Prosecutors also announced charges against a dozen other people, including former military officers, over the massacre. The list of charges will apparently include murder, terrorism and conspiracy.</p> <p>The attorney general, Rodolfo Delgado, wrote on his Twitter account that his office “is determined to go after those accused of ordering this regrettable and tragic event”.</p>

Return to Top	<p>The former president, who served from 1989 to 1994, has denied any involvement or knowledge of the plan to kill the priests.</p> <p>On 16 November 1989 an elite commando unit killed the six priests – five Spaniards and one Salvadoran – along with their housekeeper and the housekeeper’s daughter in the priests’ residence. The killers tried to make the massacre appear as though it had been carried out by leftist guerrillas.</p> <p>Attempts within El Salvador to investigate and prosecute the masterminds of the killings during the country’s civil war had been deflected by legal manoeuvres after the high court declared the 1993 amnesty established after the war to be unconstitutional in 2016.</p> <p>The probe had been put on hold when the military officers appealed the case to the supreme court in 2019. But in January the court ordered the reopening of the investigation.</p> <p>Nine members of the military were initially put on trial, but a court absolved seven of them. Two officers served short sentences but were released in 1993 under the amnesty.</p> <p>After the supreme court found the amnesty unconstitutional, a judge ordered one of those officers, Col Guillermo Benavides, back to prison where he remains.</p> <p>While the case stalled at home, a Spanish court in 2020 sentenced former Salvadoran Col Inocente Orlando Montano to 133 years for the priests’ killings.</p> <p>The court called the massacre “state terrorism” carried out by powerful interests, including Cristiani, aimed at “holding on to their positions of privilege within the power structures”.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Redmond rash car break-ins Marymoor Park
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/break-ins-cirque-du-soleil-marymoore-park/281-bdf07c56-f348-4847-8660-27ccc0e38847
GIST	<p>REDMOND, Wash. — A rash of car break-ins has been reported at Marymoor Park in Redmond, while it is hosting Cirque du Soleil.</p> <p>As many as 28 break-ins were reported, according to a King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks spokesperson Doug Williams.</p> <p>"We are aware of and dismayed by the vehicle break-ins that occurred at the Cirque du Soleil shows at Marymoor Park earlier this week and are taking immediate action to help prevent this from occurring again," Williams said via email.</p> <p>A check with the King County Sheriff's Office showed there were five reported car burglaries Wednesday night between 9 p.m. and 10:45 p.m., a window period when a performance was going on. Since Jan. 1, there were 11 calls about vehicle break-ins at the park, according to KCSO.</p> <p>KCSO spokesperson Manny Apostol said those were only dispatch calls and there could be significantly more reports of break-ins submitted online, or have yet to file a report.</p> <p>"Please lock your cars and do not leave valuables inside. This is what motivates car prowlers. When they know someone will be away from their vehicles for an extended period of time (such as a show) they take advantage of that time span," Apostol said via email.</p> <p>It's a problem the Hartnells are aware of. The couple traveled from Puyallup to attend the show Friday night and made sure valuables are out of their vehicle before leaving.</p>

	<p>Heather Hartnell knows such crimes are common, having worked in fundraising at large venues, where she heard about car break-ins often.</p> <p>"If somebody breaks your window, you're out that money even if they didn't steal anything," Hartnell said.</p> <p>Two uniformed KCSO deputies will be at the Marymoor event space during Cirque du Soleil performances to provide security, traffic services and regular patrolling at the lot, according to Williams.</p> <p>Deputies and King County Parks staff will also increase patrols of the employee and guest parking areas during shows.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Tukwila police: woman shot, injured
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/woman-shot-injured-tukwila/NAQJTBZVRNHC7AHBOW44SYEEBA/
GIST	<p>TUKWILA, Wash. — A woman was reportedly shot and injured in Tukwila, according to the Tukwila Police Department.</p> <p>Around 2:06 a.m. on Feb. 25, officers responded to a report of an illegal discharge in the 3400 block of South 144th Street.</p> <p>Officers found an adult woman with a gunshot wound.</p> <p>She was transported to a hospital for her injuries, which were not considered life-threatening.</p> <p>Officers believe the incident was not a random act of violence.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/25 Police: 2 dead; shooting then SUV collision
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/2-dead-1-injured-after-shooting-involving-two-suvs-followed-by-3-car-collision/DW3C6ESFC5DUVBV5PFOILSWDM/
GIST	<p>LAKEWOOD, Wash. — Two people are dead and another was injured in a collision following a shooting involving two SUVs in Lakewood on Friday night.</p> <p>Police said they were first called at about 8:30 p.m. about shots being fired from two SUVs at 108th Street Southwest and Lakeview Avenue Southwest.</p> <p>Only a minute later, another call came in about a collision at 112th Street Southwest and Gravelly Lake Drive near Clover Park High School, authorities said.</p> <p>Officials said one of the SUVs got into a crash involving three cars.</p> <p>Two men were thrown from the SUV and pronounced dead at the scene, police said. A third man was injured and taken to the hospital. Police said the SUV had a bullet hole in it.</p> <p>Those riding in the other cars were not injured.</p> <p>However, police said the other SUV involved in the shooting got away.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing.</p>
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